WILD WEST WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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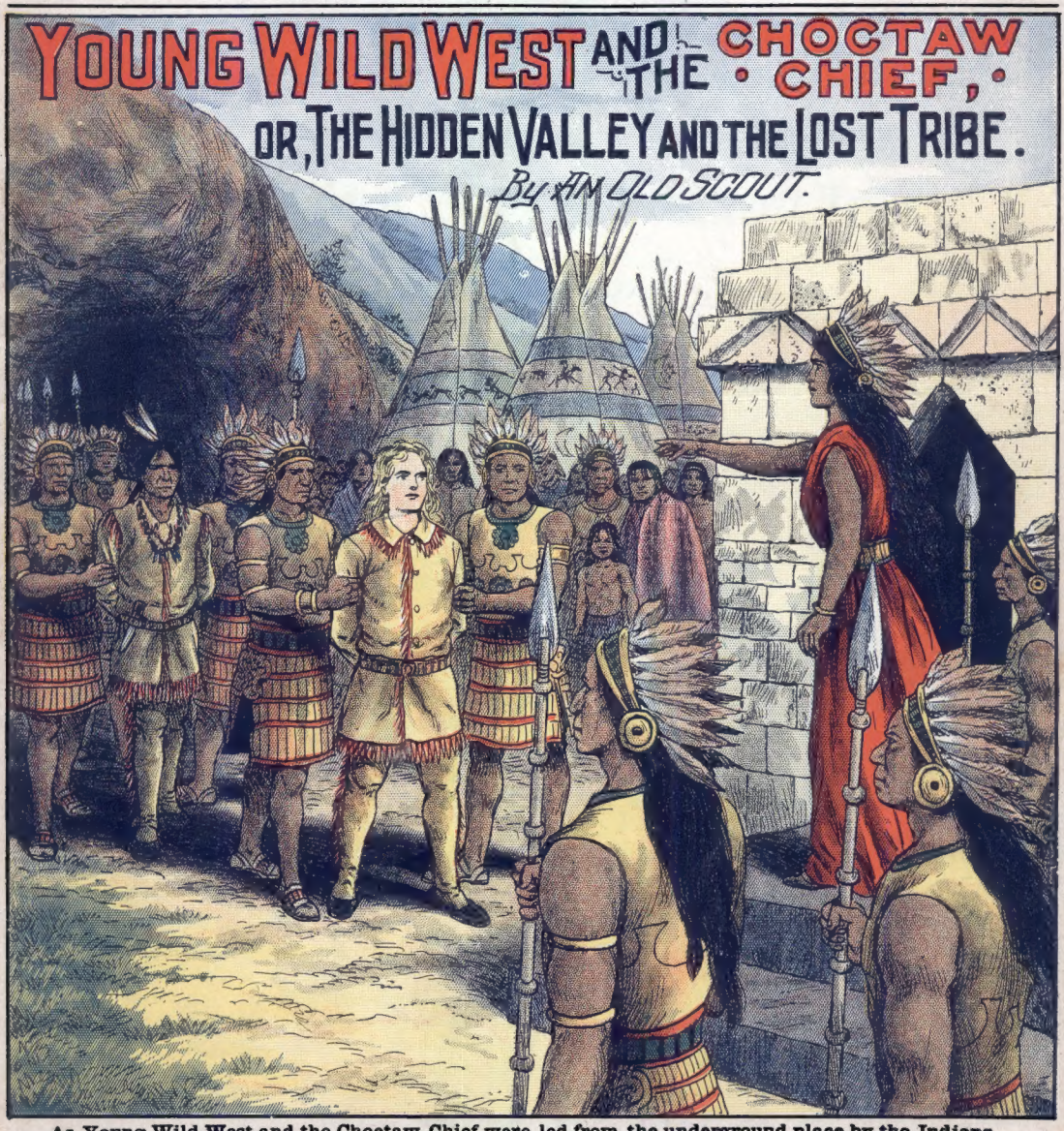
YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE CHOCTAW CHIEF,

OR, THE HIDDEN VALLEY AND THE LOST TRIBE.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



As Young Wild West and the Choctaw Chief were led from the underground place by the Indians they beheld the beautiful princess of the Lost Tribe standing upon a stone dais. "Listen!" she said, dramatically. "You came unbidden to the Hidden Valley, and the penalty is death!"

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YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE CHOCTAW CHIEF

OR,

The Hidden Valley and the Lost Tribe

By AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

PREPARING FOR AN ATTACK FROM THE APACHES.

It was a sunshiny day in the fall a few years ago that a party, consisting of eight, might have been seen riding along a tortuous trail in the mountains of southern Arizona.

The bracing air of the mountains lent a color of health and vigor to their cheeks, and three of the party being females attired in gay colors, the wildness of the scenery that surrounded them made them look picturesque and dashing in the extreme.

The leader of the eight was a handsome, athletic boy of perhaps twenty, whose long chestnut hair hung below his shoulders, lending him the appearance of one who, in spite of his youthfulness, had experienced a varied life on the boundless plains and mountains of the great West.

And this was indeed the case, for the boy was no other than the famous Champion Deadshot of the West and Prince of the Saddle, Young Wild West.

This young hero has no equal in his particular line of business, and many were the thrilling and hairbreadth escapes he has passed through.

Strong, active, quick as a flash, daring even unto recklessness, and cool at any stage of the game, Young Wild West was a person to be emulated and admired by all who believe in fair play and an honesty of purpose.

He was attired in a neat-fitting suit of buckskin that was trimmed with scarlet fringe, wore a wide-brimmed sombrero that sat rakishly on the back of his head, and was armed with a Winchester repeating rifle, a brace of Colt's revolvers, and a hunting knife.

The horse he was riding was one of the finest specimens of its kind, it being a clean-limbed sorrel stallion that showed signs of great speed and endurance.

Riding at our hero's side was his sweetheart, Arietta Murdock, a very pretty blond of seventeen or eighteen.

Arietta was a true Western girl, and she could shoot with a rifle or revolver, or ride a horse as well as the average man.

She was very cool and brave, too, and her ready wit had gotten her out of many dangers.

Behind Young Wild West and his pretty sweetheart rode Jim Dart, a young Westerner, about the same age as our hero, and his sweetheart, Eloise Gardner.

Jim was attired in a similar fashion to the leader of the party, and, having been born and reared on the plains of Wyoming, he was every inch a boy of the West.

Eloise was a rather delicate young girl, who was becoming used to the ways of the wild West. She was a brunette, and was in direct contrast to Arietta.

The third couple of the party was Cheyenne Charlie and his wife, Anna.

Cheyenne Charlie was an ex-government scout and Indian fighter.

He was slightly over six feet in height, straight as an arrow and attractive in appearance.

His age was in the neighborhood of thirty, while his wife, who was inclined to be a little stout, was some five years his junior, and very attractive in appearance.

The scout wore an attire similar to that of our hero and Jim Dart, and he, as well as the girls, was well armed.

The last of the party was a Chinaman, who was riding a piebald cayuse and leading two pack-horses that were loaded with a camping outfit. Another Chinaman was also with the pack-horses.

Anyone to look at the Chinamen would have seen

nothing different in them than in the average of their race, except, perhaps, that the expression of their yellow countenances were more child-like and innocent than the general run of such faces.

They were Hop Wah and Wing Wah, the trusted servants of Young Wild West.

At the time of which we write, outbreaks of the Indians were common occurrences, and the wilderness of southern Arizona and other parts of the West served as a hiding place for lawless white men, who made their living by preying upon miners and travelers.

The unwritten law was that a horse thief should be hanged the minute he was caught, and the time-honored principle that "self-defense is the first law of nature" was shown up in its fullness.

Many were the cases where an honest man had to "kill his man" or be killed himself.

Though his main headquarters were at Weston, Dakota, where he owned a large tract of mining land, Young Wild West made frequent tours through the wildest parts of the West, sometimes on business, and sometimes in search of adventure.

Occasionally he took with him, besides his two partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, the three girls, as he always called them in speaking of them.

Though it was dangerous to travel around in the wild parts, the girls were quite used to it, and they were always capable and willing to put up a fight when attacked.

As we find them our friends are making a journey by horseback to a ranch owned by Young Wild West, which was located in the western part of Texas on the banks of the Rio Grande.

They were still a long way from their destination, but that did not bother them.

There was plenty of game to be shot on the way, and every few days they came to a civilized place, thus enabling them to keep a supply of provisions they would need.

For the past two days they had been following a trail without meeting a human being, for it was a wild country, as has already been stated.

The afternoon was well advanced when Young Wild West suddenly came to a halt and held up his hand.

Instantly all hands reined in their steeds, and looked at him questioningly.

Without a word he pointed to a thin column of smoke that was rising above the treetops probably a mile distant.

The boy's sharp eyes had caught sight of this before any of the rest noticed it.

"Injuns!" remarked Cheyenne Charlie, laconically.

Young Wild West nodded.

"I guess so," he answered.

Then he cast a look around as far as his eye could reach.

Even as he looked around another column of smoke suddenly appeared about a mile off to the right.

It came from behind a little cone-shaped hill in a comparatively clear spot.

"That is the answer," he observed. "The Apaches are on the warpath, just as we heard they were at the last place we stopped at. Well, I guess we are likely to see something of them before long. There is no doubt that they have seen us, and that the smoke signals mean that we are to be corraled by the redskins. I guess we had better be on the lookout."

This was said in such a cool and easy way that one would hardly be apt to think that any such serious danger lurked near them.

But what could be more dangerous than to have a band of Apache Indians signalling to another to come and make ready to capture a small party of whites?

What show could the eight have with a score or more of savage red men, the average person would ask.

But Young Wild West and his two faithful partners had fought and whipped many a band of Indians, and that is why they were not so greatly alarmed now.

"Well, which way do we go now, Wild?" asked Cheyenne Charlie.

"Right ahead," was the reply. "As soon as we find a good place we will halt and go into camp. It isn't likely the redskins will bother us before dark, so the quicker we find a suitable spot to camp the more time we will have to get ready for them."

"That's it," exclaimed Jim Dart. "All we want is half a chance, and we will make the Apaches sick if they bother us."

"I never had the least idea that we would find any hostile Indians on the journey," remarked Arietta. "But there is never any telling just when the red demons will break out and go on the warpath. Well, I am ready to give you all the help I can, anyhow," and the brave girl placed her hand on the rifle that hung over her shoulder and nodded decisively.

"That's right, Et," answered her dashing young lover. "You are as good as any man living when it comes to drawing a bead on a creeping Indian. Anna and Eloise have always been able to help you a little, too, and if it comes to the worst I expect to hear you three cracking away at a great rate. Always remember, though, to never pull a trigger unless you've got your man covered. We can't afford to waste any lead in a skirmish with redskins."

"I am sure I'll do my best, Wild," said Eloise, a little nervously. "I can shoot very well now, and I am proud of it."

"And if I shoot an Indian or two it will not be the first time," spoke up Anna.

Cheyenne Charlie nodded patronizingly.

"That's right, gal," he said. "I've made a real Westerner of you, an' I'm proud of it."

Of course this sort of talk did not tend to add to the fears of the girls.

On the other hand, it made them more courageous.

Young Wild West gave the word and they started along the trail.

"Just get the pack-horses off that snail-pace they have been going on all day, Hop," said our hero to the Chinaman. "There is going to be some lively work before the sun rises again, if I am not mistaken. You have got to be on the lookout, or you may lose your pigtail. The Apaches like Chinaman's scalps, I have heard."

"Me no 'flaid of Apaches," replied the Celestial. "Me shootee velly stlaight; me killee six, ten, twelve ledskins allee samee quickee you say um Jack Lobinson."

"I bet you will," sneered the scout. "You might drop

one of 'em if he stays in front of you long enough to let you git a good aim on him."

Charlie did not dislike Hop Wah, but he had it in for him, because the Celestial had got the best of him in two or three little games of chance.

Wing, the other Celestial, was all right, as he was a quiet fellow.

"Misler Charlie velly nicee man, but him findee out four kings no beatee um four aces," answered the Chinaman, smiling and looking at the sky.

This brought a laugh from all but the scout.

He gave a grunt of disgust and remained silent on the subject.

It was just about five o'clock when they reached a spot that was at least three miles from either of the smoke columns they had seen, which just suited Young Wild West for a camping place.

It was at the foot of a towering cliff, with a shallow mountain stream near it.

Rocks and boulders were plentifully scattered around and these would afford protection in case of an attack.

"Here we are!" exclaimed our hero. "Now get to work, all hands, and we'll soon have a snug little camp. It may be that we will have to remain here longer than to-night, for if the Apaches are very thick around here it will be safer to remain than it will to try to run the gauntlet."

Young Wild West never did anything by halves.

He believed in the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

He did not doubt in the least that they had been picked out by the villainous redskins to be attacked.

Under his orders Cheyenne Charlie took an ax from their outfit and proceeded to cut down a lofty pine.

When the tree was felled it was cut up into logs, which were criscrossed between two big rocks to form an effective barricade.

It took an hour to do this, and during that time the two tents had been erected.

All the while Young Wild West and his partners were working they were keeping a watch for some signs of the Indians.

But nothing happened, and when it finally came sunset they had a camp fixed up that would take more than a score of Indians to capture, to say the least.

Supper was ready now, for our hero knew it would be useless to try and conceal their location, and he let the Chinaman go ahead and make a fire.

If the Apaches were after them they knew just where they were at that very minute.

It had just begun to grow dark when the hoot of an owl sounded from a clump of timber off to the left.

Then an answering cry came from behind a jutting point of rock, almost in front of the camp.

"They they are!" exclaimed Young Wild West, in a low tone of voice. "Get ready for business, everybody."

CHAPTER II.

CATCHING THE REDSKINS NAPPING.

As our friends had eaten their supper, there was no longer any use in keeping a fire going.

It had been extinguished as soon as they were through, but there was no doubt but that the Apaches had been attracted to the spot by the smoke.

While Young Wild West had no idea just how many of them there were, he was not worried over the outcome.

Many were the times that he and his friends had been attacked by hostile Indians, and it seldom happened that they got the worst of it.

Even if they were surprised and beaten for a time, they always managed to get out of it alive.

"Boys," said the dashing young deadshot, addressing his two partners in a low tone of voice, "keep a sharp watch. It is quite likely that the red fiends will try to steal up as close as possible before they make the attack. They are on the warpath, and they mean to wipe out all the palefaces they come across, no doubt. But I reckon they will get more than they bargained for when they tackle us. This is a pretty good place to stand a siege."

"Right yer are, Wild," answered the scout, nodding his approval to what the boy said. "Just let 'em come on. We'll show 'em what we kin do in ther line of shootin'. Injuns don't like hot lead much, I know, an' when some of 'em begin droppin' ther rest will be in a hurry to git out of ther way, see if they ain't."

For the space of fully five minutes no other sounds were heard that would indicate that there were Indians about.

It was growing darker all the time, and it was easy for our friends to guess that the Indians were waiting until darkness came, so that they might have a better chance of creeping upon them.

At the expiration of the five minutes another signal sounded.

This time it was much closer by, and turning his gaze in that direction, our hero saw a bush move.

It was but a small bush, but he knew very well that an Indian was concealed behind it.

The distance was less than two hundred feet, and raising his rifle to his shoulder, he took aim at the part of the bush that would about be on a line with the breast of a crouching person behind it, and pressed the trigger.

Crang!

As the sharp report rang out and echoed through the little hollow a human form shot out from behind the bush.

There was a sharp cry and then down it went upon the ground.

"There goes the first one," observed our hero, coolly. "I had to do it, boys. There is nothing like letting redskins know that you are ready for them."

The two big rocks and the logs that had been placed across the open space between them afforded an excellent shelter from that direction, while in the rear was a steep bank that overhung some few feet above them.

In order to reach them, in case they made a rush, the Apaches must come at both ends, and even if they did this they would have to show themselves in the open, and this would simply give our friends a chance to pour a galling fire into their ranks from either side.

Probably five minutes elapsed before anything further was heard.

Then all of a sudden a fierce yell sounded directly in front of the camp, and out of the woods came a score or more of hurrying human forms.

The Apaches had decided to make a combined attack upon the camp.

Steady, boys," said our hero in his cool and easy way. "Don't fire until I do."

He had scarcely spoken when a volley came from the Indians, the bullets chipping pieces from the logs and flattening against the rocks.

The girls were crouching behind one of the big rocks, each with a rifle ready to assist in the defense of the camp, while the two Chinamen had flattened themselves upon the ground closer under the bank, so as to be out of harm's way.

Neither of them were much on shooting, so they were just as well off there as they would have been if they had tried to help.

The last shot of the volley had scarcely died out when Young Wild West exclaimed:

"Now then, give it to the red fiends!"

Crang!

He fired the first shot, and then for the next ten seconds it seemed as though a squad of soldiers were firing a salute.

Every bullet found its billet, so it seemed, for the yelling redskins dropped right and left, while those who escaped the leaden hail that came from the camp turned and fled in wild dismay.

"I reckon that sorter startled them somewhat," observed Charlie, a grim smile playing about his tanned and weather-beaten visage.

Then, as he saw one of the attacking party limping away to the left, a rifle in his hand, his Winchester spoke once more.

There was no doubt but the redskin meant to take a shot at them from a point from the left, so that he might stand a chance of hitting one of those in the little camp; but if such was the case it was all off, for Charlie's bullet cut him down.

"Why don't you come on, you red galoots?" shouted Young Wild West, from behind the barricade of logs. "You started in pretty well, so you might as well keep on coming. We are ready for you, and you can bet that you'll get all that's coming to you."

There was no answer to this.

The Indians had become wonderfully silent after that galling fusillade.

No doubt they were much surprised at what had occurred, and the chances were that they would be more careful about making another attack.

But that they would not go away very soon our friends were pretty sure of.

It was not the way for hostile Indians to leave the camp of their paleface foes after they had once attacked it.

But they are crafty fellows, and what they can't do on the sly no human being can.

Of course our friends understood all this, and as they had fought them many times before, they knew just what to expect, and how to act.

It might be that they would be compelled to wait all the night long before another attack came, but that it would come they were certain of.

As near as they could judge, about ten of the redskins had fallen, and they figured that there were probably a dozen or fifteen of them left.

It might be, however, that there were more close by, and that they would be sent for to join in the fight against the palefaces.

After waiting half an hour, and hearing nothing that would indicate that the redskins meant to resume the fight very soon, our hero said:

"I reckon I'll go out and find out what the red fiends are up to. There is nothing like knowing just what your foe intends to do, as then you are able to put up a defense that means something. I won't get into any trouble with them, as I'll be very careful. But in case I am surprised I will let you know right away."

"All right, Wild," answered the scout. "I reckon you know jest what you are doing."

"Be careful, Wild," advised Arietta. "You know that the Apaches are very clever, and that they never miss an opportunity. If they should catch you it would be all up with you."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Et," retorted the young deadshot coolly. "The chances are they know me, and that being the case, they won't want to put me out of the way at once. They are fond of torturing their prisoners, especially those they hate. The Apaches hate me, of course, for they have heard of the part I have taken in subduing them when they have been on the rampage. They hate Charlie and Jim, too, for they have not forgotten my partners, you can bet. But I'll be careful, so don't worry, little girl."

Having made up his mind what he was going to do, Wild lost no time in setting out.

There was no moon, but the stars were now brightly shining overhead, and objects could be discerned quite plainly at a considerable distance.

But this made little difference to Young Wild West.

He was used to scouting and spying upon the camps of hostile Indians.

Keeping close to the foot of the sloping bank that ran off to the right of the camp, he gradually worked his way until he came to a point where the bushes and trees grew in profusion.

Then he could proceed faster, for there was less danger of his being seen by the redskins.

On he went, making a detour that would bring him to the rear of the patch of woods from which the yelling fiends had rushed when they made the attack.

So cautiously did he proceed that not a sound came from him, not even the crack of a twig.

It was not very long before he got where he wanted to, and then he turned straight back and moved to where he thought the Apaches must be.

He had not covered more than a dozen yards when the unmistakable sounds of low, guttural voices reached his ears.

The boy paused and gave a nod of satisfaction.

He had left his rifle at the camp, as he did not want to be hampered with it, but in his right hand was one of his ever-ready revolvers.

Wild did not want to use this unless he was obliged to, however, for in case he met one of the Indians, who was on guard, there was no necessity of his shooting him.

A knife-thrust or a blow from his fist would answer the purpose just as well, and then perhaps the rest of the fiends would not know of his presence.

It was not long that he paused, for he was anxious to find out how many there were of the redskins, and what they intended to do.

Stealthily he crept along, and the next minute he was so close to the group of Apaches that he could hear them breathe.

Then it was that the dashing boy hero took his position close to a fallen tree and listened.

The redskins were talking in their own tongue, and though he could not understand the lingo thoroughly, he picked up enough of what they said to learn that they were going to watch until midnight and then attack the camp on both sides by creeping up and making a hand-to-hand fight of it.

It was very dark where they were gathered, so the boy could not tell exactly how many of them there were.

But he judged that there were not more than fifteen.

After listening for about ten minutes, and being unable to find out anything further, he started to make his way back to the camp.

"I reckon we won't give the red galoots the chance to attack us," he muttered under his breath. "I'll just fetch Charlie and Jim back here, and then we'll do the attacking. It might be a good idea to fetch Hop along, too. He can set off some of his firecrackers to scare them, and then we can do the rest. A very good idea, I reckon."

Wild reached the camp easily, for there was no one in the way to interfere with him.

He quickly reported what he had learned, and then told Charlie and Jim to get themselves in shape to go with him.

"You come, too, Hop," he added, nodding to the crouching Chinaman, who was listening just as though he thought he was going to receive the invitation. "Just have a good big firecracker ready to light and throw among them when I say the word. Do you understand?

"Me allee samee undelstand, Misler Wild," replied the Celestial. "Me velly muchee glad to go, so be. Me wakee up um ledskins velly muchee quickee, so be."

The girls felt much relieved when they heard that there were not so many of the Apaches after all, and they settled down to await the result.

It did not take them more than five minutes to make their preparations for the attack on the group of Indians concealed in the woods.

Wild led the way by the same route he had taken before, his partners following without making a particle of noise.

But Hop could do this sort of thing almost as well as they, as he had been associated with them so long that he had learned much of woodcraft.

Occasionally he would make a little sound, as his hand or foot came in contact with a shrub or bush, but it was not sufficiently loud for the Apaches to hear it.

In this way they proceeded until they came to the spot where our hero had waited while he listened to the guttural conversation of the fiendish braves.

They were in the same spot and still talking, though in very low tones.

There was no doubt but that they had one or two of their members posted close to the edge of the woods, so they might keep a watch upon the camp continually.

But if such was the case these had failed to note the fact that anyone had left the camp.

Telling Charlie and Jim to remain right where they were, Wild touched Hop on the arm and motioned for him to follow him.

He wanted to get within a few feet of the redskins before he let the Chinaman act.

Hop had a big home-made cracker in one hand and a match in the other.

He was ready for business, and not the least fear did he have of being heard by the Indians.

They were too close now to even risk a whispered word, for there was no telling but that some keen-eared redskin might hear them.

Just as our hero was about to nudge the Chinaman to go ahead he heard one of the savages speak roughly to someone.

Listening, he heard the Indian talking to what must surely be a prisoner, using threatening language and telling him that if he uttered a sound he would die instantly.

This was a little surprising to Wild, for he had not dreamed of such a thing as the attacking party being in possession of a prisoner.

But it told him that they must proceed carefully and not injure the prisoner.

Peering through the bushes, he managed, as dark as it was, to pick out the redskin who was doing the talking, and then it was quite easy for him to see that the prisoner was tied to a tree in a sitting position.

Touching Hop on the arm he pointed toward them, and then motioned that he was to hurl the firecracker off to the right a little.

The Chinaman nodded, and then scratched the match.

The very instant the flame appeared it was applied to the fuse of the cracker, and then, as quick as a flash, Hop hurled it exactly to the spot the dashing young deadshot pointed out.

Bang!

A report that was as loud as a small cannon sounded in the woods, and yells of terror and surprise came from the lips of the redskins.

"On them, boys," shouted Young Wild West, and then he opened fire upon the Apaches.

Charlie and Jim joined in, and in less than two minutes there was not a redskin to be seen standing.

Some of them got away, of course.

Our friends knew this, for they heard the clatter of hoofs, which showed that the horses of the attacking party were close at hand, and that those escaping had managed to reach them.

Leaving Charlie and Jim to reckon with those who were

fleeing, Wild turned his attention to the prisoner who was tied to the tree.

As he struck a match he was surprised to find that it was an Indian.

CHAPTER III.

LONE DOG, THE CHOCTAW CHIEF.

"Hello, redskin!" he exclaimed, as he held the match so he could see the features of the Indian. "I reckon you are not an Apache."

"Me Lone Dog, the Choctaw Chief," was the quick reply, for the prisoner was very cool, in spite of his position, and what had happened.

Without any hesitation the young deadshot severed the ropes that bound him to the tree.

"There you are," he said. "Now then, you can light out."

The Indian stretched his arms to get the blood in circulation, and slowly shook his head.

"Me no want to go away," he declared. "The Apaches will catch me, and then they will torture me. Lone Dog will stay with the brave young paleface who has saved his life."

"All right. I won't make you go, if you don't want to. But I reckon I'll get after the Apaches now. They wanted us mighty bad, and they meant to get us, too. But I reckon they have changed their minds now. We didn't wait for them to make another attack; we just went at them."

Then our hero turned and ran in the direction his two partners had taken.

Hop Wah was right close at hand, and when the rescued redskin called softly to him he did not know whether to go or not.

The Chinaman had seen enough of Indians to know that they were very tricky.

"Me good chief," said Lone Dog, as he moved toward the Celestial. "Me no fight the palefaces. Me a Choctaw."

"Allee light," answered Hop. "Whattee you allee samee wantee?"

"We take blankets and guns to your camp."

"Lat velly goodee idea, so be."

Then Hop took the risk of helping him at the work he proposed, but he was keeping a good watch on him meanwhile.

More than half the Apaches had fallen under the close fire of our weapons, and the Choctaw chief went from one body to another, taking the weapons from it.

He soon completed the rather gruesome task, and then he gave a grunt of satisfaction and said:

"Now me go to your camp. Me tell paleface boy me go there. Me no want the Apaches to catch me. They put me to torture, because me no tell what me know."

"Allee light," answered Hop. "You comee light along, so be; me takee you lere pletty quickee."

There was really nothing to keep them there now, so the clever Chinaman led the way to the camp.

The girls were in a state of worriment, as they did not know how Wild and his partners had made out.

When they saw Hop coming with an Indian they knew not what to make of it.

At first they thought it was a prisoner that had been taken, but when they saw his arms filled with blankets, guns, etc., this thought quickly left them.

"Who have you here, Hop?" Arietta asked.

"Lis allee samee um Choctaw chief, so be, Missy Alietta," was the reply. "Misler Wild findee him tied to um tlee; he allee samee um plisoner of um Apaches, so be. He velly muchee goodee Injun, so him say."

Lone Dog deposited his load upon the ground, and then he bowed to the girls.

"Me good Injun," he declared, bearing out what Hop had said, and acting very earnest about it. "The Apaches hate me, and they want to torture me, so I will tell them of the Hidden Valley and the Lost Tribe. But Lone Dog will never tell them; he will be true to his promise to the princess of the Lost Tribe."

The girls could not help becoming interested in what the redskin said.

There was something suggestive of mystery about it, and mystery was something they were really fond of.

But they did not attempt to question him just then, they knowing the ways of the Indian pretty well.

If he wanted to confide anything to them he would do it without being questioned.

Arietta asked Hop the result of the attack upon the Apaches, and he quickly made known the result.

"Wipee um ledskins outee velly muchee quickee," he added, when he had related how he had set off the firecracker to set the ball rolling.

Lone Dog sat down and remained silent.

In a few minutes Wild and his partners came back.

"I reckon we won't hear from the red galoots again tonight," he said. "We certainly did give it to them good and hard. They won't dare to come back here again, unless they get help. We'll be all right for the night, I am sure."

Lone Dog gave a grunt of approval at this, and then, for the first time, our hero thought of the redskin he had cut from the tree.

"So you are the Choctaw chief, eh?" he observed. "Jim, I reckon you can light a lantern now. Then we can see what our guest looks like."

Dart hastened to light the lantern, and then the Choctaw chief stepped into the light, so they could look him over to their hearts' content.

"Me good Injun; no make fight with palefaces," he declared. "Lone Dog very thankful, for the paleface boy with the long hair and his friends saved his life. Me never forget! Me make good pay for it."

"Well, Lone Dog, I reckon you don't have to pay us anything for saving you from your enemies. We always stand ready to do a good turn for anyone who is deserving of it, whether he is white, black, yellow or red. You needed help mighty bad, I suppose, and I am glad we were able to give it. But tell me what you know about the Apaches. Are there many of them around?"

"Not many," was the reply. "Fifty, all told. They left the reservation to kill the palefaces and rob them, so

they could have plenty of guns, blankets and horses to go and find the Hidden Valley and the Lost Tribe. They know that Lone Dog knows where it is, so they catch him and put him to torture to make him tell. But me no tell. The Princess of the Lost Tribe make me promise not to tell the Apaches, and me die first."

"That's ther way ter talk, Injun," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "I like ter hear a man talk that way, even if he is a redskin."

"Charlie, I reckon you had better be on the watch, anyhow. The Apaches may take a notion to come back. There is no telling just what they will do, you know."

As our hero said this the scout nodded and promptly started to take a walk around the outskirts of the camp.

"The Apaches no come back to-night," said Lone Dog, shaking his head and looking at the young deadshot. "They will have to travel one sun before they find more braves. Then they will come back and try to catch the palefaces and Lone Dog. They want the guns and supplies of the palefaces, and they want Lone Dog to tell them the trail to the Hidden Valley."

"What sort of a place is this Hidden Valley you speak about, chief?" Wild asked, as he motioned the chief to a seat, and then sat down himself.

"A very fine place, brave young paleface," was the reply. "I have been there, and I was welcome. I went away, when no one knew it but beautiful Metahwa, the princess of the Lost Tribe. She told me to find her lover and bring him to her; but she could not tell me who or what he was. She only said that he must not be an Apache. The Lost Tribe fear the Apaches, though they come of the same race."

As the Choctaw chief went on talking his English got better, which showed that he had been educated at the schools of the reservation he had been brought up on.

Suddenly he looked sharply at the dashing boy with the long chestnut hair and said:

"What is the paleface boy's name?"

"Young Wild West is my name."

"I thought so. Lone Dog has heard of you many times. You are a great brave, though you are young. Your years have been few, but you have seen and done much. Lone Dog likes you, from what he has heard of you. But he likes you more for what you have done for him. As a reward for saving his life, he will take you to the Hidden Valley and the Lost Tribe, if you will go."

"You will go, won't you, Wild?" Arietta spoke up, quickly.

"Certainly I will, provided he is willing that all hands of us shall go," was the reply. "What's the matter, Et? Getting interested, I see."

"Well, what the chief has said has an air of mystery about it, and this is what I like, you know."

"Of course. We all like mystery. A hidden valley, with a lost tribe in it, certainly savors of the mysterious. I reckon we will see some new things to study up if we can manage to get there. But since the Apaches are bent on getting there, too, it means that we are going to have some fighting to do, I reckon."

"The Apaches must never get there," declared Lone Dog, shaking his head. "They must not know where the Hidden Valley is. They know it is somewhere, and they know that the Indians who call themselves the Lost Tribe are there; but they can not find the place. They have tried for many, many moons."

"And you are satisfied to take us to the Hidden Valley, eh, Lone Dog?"

"Yes, for I know Young Wild West and his friends like to go where things are new and strange to them. They will find Indians there who do not want to make war on the palefaces, but want to live as their forefathers did before the palefaces came to the great hunting grounds and the land that was rich with gold and jewels."

"Yes, we like adventure, Lone Dog. If it wasn't for adventure and excitement I don't know how I could ever content myself. The wilder the places are that I go to the better I like it. But there are so many bad men, both white and red, in the West that much of our time is taken up with them. I believe that all men should be honest, Lone Dog. There is a chance for everyone here in the West, if he is willing to work. But there are so many who do not want to work. They want to steal what others have worked for; and they will kill to get it, too. White men are worse than Indians in this respect. It is only now and then that some of the Indians become troublesome. They hate the palefaces, as they call us, and when they find a chief to lead them they will break out once in a while. Sometimes they do a lot of damage before the soldiers get them, but never do they succeed in accomplishing what they strive for. Redskins are a race of the past, as far as governing is concerned. They have got to submit to the superior knowledge of the white man."

The Choctaw chief bowed his head.

"Lone Dog learned the lesson many, many moons ago," he said, after a moment of silence. "He knows, and he is willing to follow the palefaces—the good palefaces."

"You talk like a sensible redskin, I reckon," our hero remarked, as he nodded to what the Indian said. "Well, it just happens that we feel the need of something exciting, and if you will lead the way to this Hidden Valley, where the Lost Tribe is supposed to live, we will go with you. We will try and see to it that the band of Apaches so anxious to get you won't have the chance. They want us, too, but they won't get us. You just leave that to me, Lone Dog. I am only a boy, but I reckon I know something about fighting Apaches. I have done considerable of it, and that is what counts."

"Young Wild West and his friends will go with Lone Dog to the Hidden Valley, where Princess Metahwa rules the Lost Tribe," the Choctaw chief declared, solemnly. "The princess did not tell me I must tell the palefaces of the valley and its wonders; she made me promise I would not tell the Apaches. She fears them, above any tribe or race, for she comes of their race, and knows what they are. She is pining for someone other than the young men who live in the valley. There is no one there who is her equal."

"Me allee samee makee goodee husband for um princess," spoke up Hop, who, as usual, was taking in all that was said.

"You have already had a squaw for a wife, Hop. I should think one would be enough for you," said Wild, with a smile.

"Yes, but she allee samee gittee sickee and die down

at Buckhorn Lanch. Me no havee her velly muchee long, Misler Wild," replied the Chinaman, earnestly.

Lone Dog looked at the Celestial and shook his head.

"Maybe the Princess Metahwa no likee Chinee," he said. "But Lone Dog will try."

CHAPTER IV.

THE APACHES SHOW UP AGAIN.

Cheyenne Charlie came back to the camp in less than an hour and reported that he was satisfied the Apaches were nowhere about.

"Well, according to what Lone Dog says we'll not hear from them again this night," said Wild. "I reckon we may as well take it easy until morning, though we'll keep the usual watch."

The Choctaw chief seemed to take quite a notion to the scout, and he was soon telling him all that he had already related to the rest of the party.

Charlie was very much interested, for like Wild and the others, he was fond of anything that had a mysterious air about it.

"How big is this here Hidden Valley?" he asked, after the Indian had ceased talking about it.

"Maybe twenty miles long and ten miles wide," was the reply. "Heap much high mountains on all sides; plenty fruit, good grass, water and corn. Antelope, deer and much birds. Indians who live there have plenty to eat and no have to work much. Heap fine place. Gold, silver and jewels there. The lost tribe live like Indians two hundred years ago. Plenty fine dress and good time all the time."

"That sounds pretty good to me, I reckon," and the scout nodded his head. "How in thunder did you come to find out about this place?"

"Me go there six moons ago. Me get lost in mountains, and when big storm come me fall into water that go under the ground. Lone Dog come near drown, but he come out all right, and then he find the Hidden Valley he come to. Me stay there one moon, and then the princess say me go away and find nice young man and bring back, so she can marry. Me no find nice young man Indian, but me talk to one who is a Pawnee. He make laugh at Lone Dog, and he tell what I say about the Lost Tribe. Then Bad Face, the chief of the Apaches, he hear about it, and he try to make me tell where the Hidden Valley is. I no tell, and he get mad and pretty soon he make a lot of braves leave the reservation to make war on the palefaces and steal guns, blankets, horses and provisions, so he can go to the Hidden Valley. He think plenty gold there, so he go and kill all the Lost Tribe. Bad Face and his braves catch me yesterday before they find your camp. They tie me to a tree and say they kill me before another sun if I no tell. But Young Wild West come and save me. Now me take Young Wild West and his friends to the Hidden Valley, and me tell the Princess Metahwa me bring the Chinee who make the big noise when you attacked the Apaches, that he make very good husband for her. Maybe she no want Chinee for husband, but maybe she will take me."

"Well, I reckon if she knew as much as I do about that heathen of a Hop she wouldn't want him," and the scout chuckled and shot a contemptuous glance at the clever Chinaman. "I reckon if she has ther choice between you an' him she'll take you all right. As far as ther rest of us is concerned, I'm married, an' Wild an' Jim will be as soon as they git a little older, I s'pose. There's Wing, but he's out of ther question entirely, 'cause he couldn't keep awake long enough to talk ter a wife, if he had one. He's about ther sleepiest galoot I ever seen, though he kin cook a rattlin' good meal."

Our friends remained up until after ten that night, and the longer they talked with the Choctaw chief the more he seemed disposed to tell what he knew about the Hidden Valley and the Lost Tribe.

The result was that they gained enough information to understand that the valley was located in a very wild part of the mountainous region near the border of old Mexico, and that it was a tedious journey of over two days from where they now were before they could possibly reach it.

Even then it would be a difficult task to descend into the valley, without being guided by someone who had visited it before.

But Lone Dog had offered to take them there of his own free will, so there was little doubt in their minds but that they could get there all right.

There was a chance that the Indian was telling them a lot that was not true, but as they were all of an adventurous turn of mind they were willing to run the risk.

Even if they failed to find the Hidden Valley they would no doubt meet with some exciting adventures, as the Apaches, under the lead of Chief Bad Face, wanted them badly.

Fighting bands of Indians, who were on the warpath, was just to Young Wild West's liking, and his partners shared this feeling with him.

The girls were so used to that sort of thing that sometimes they really enjoyed the danger that came of such exploits.

The night passed without another interruption, and at sunrise our friends were up.

A fire was kindled and the cook was soon preparing the breakfast.

Lone Dog was without a horse, but Wild declared that he ought to be able to capture one of those that had been left when the Indians fled through the night after the attack upon them.

It was hardly likely that the mustangs would stray very far away, since the grazing was very good in that section.

Charlie offered to go with him and look for a horse, so the two started out before breakfast.

Wild and Jim assisted Hop to take care of their horses, and by the time Wild announced that the morning meal was ready for them the scout and the Choctaw chief came back with three horses, the best they could find.

This was all right, since the supplies they had captured could be carried on the two extra steeds.

They all ate heartily, for the food was good, and there

was plenty of it, and then the work of loading the pack-horses was begun.

This did not take very long, since Hop and Wing were so used to it that they worked in a systematic way.

Lone Dog showed that he knew considerable about this sort of thing, too.

He worked hard, and when the two Chinamen announced that everything was in readiness to proceed he had the two extra horses pretty well loaded, so they could travel with comparative ease and not lose anything that had been put upon them.

The sun was less than an hour high when they set out, the Choctaw chief riding at the head of the column with Young Wild West.

He had told them that it would take two days and a half to reach the Hidden Valley, so they stocked up with all the water they could carry, the brook furnishing the same.

It would take the Apaches, who had been forced to leave the vicinity, a day to get reinforced, and this would mean that they ought to be nearly at the point they were heading for before they could be overtaken.

Wild was in hopes of reaching the valley before this happened, but in case they were unable to do so he meant to give the Apaches more than they were looking for.

They had already been taught a lesson that they would not soon forget, and the chances were that they would be very cautious now of attacking Young Wild West and his friends again.

They pushed on until noon, and then halted for a rest of an hour.

Considerable game was shot by Wild and his partners on the way, as they knew they might need it before the end of their journey was reached.

In case they were hemmed in by the redskins they would need plenty of water, so they were very careful about getting all they could.

The afternoon passed without any signs of the Apaches, and when night came they selected a spot that was suitable in many ways.

There was no water there, but they were so sheltered by rocks and trees that it would take a large party of redskins to capture the camp and take possession.

But nothing happened that night, and early in the morning they were pursuing their way over the rugged section of the country.

Yawning chasms were met with, but the Choctaw chief knew the way, and he led them around to the places where they might be crossed.

The further they progressed toward the southwest the worse the traveling became.

Gradually they were nearing the part of the country where vegetation was scarce and rocks and sand plentiful.

Lone Dog told them that the desert lay entirely around the valley, and that anyone to look upon the jagged peaks that hid the valley from view would ever think that such a beautiful spot lay below them.

This was one reason, he said, why the place was not much sought for.

When night came on the second day they were about half way up the rugged incline that led to the bleak mountains that surrounded the valley.

A halt was called just before sunset, and then they prepared to pass another night.

Wild had no doubt but that the Apaches had scouts out after them, and that they would surely locate them.

"Boys," said he, to his partners, after they had eaten supper, "I reckon if we don't hear anything from the redskins to-night we'll stand a pretty good show of getting to this wonderful Hidden Valley. But I feel pretty sure that we'll hear from them before morning. It runs in my head that we will, so we want to be very cautious to-night, and keep a good watch."

"That's right, Wild," answered the scout, giving a nod of approval. "I was jest askin' Lone Dog a little while ago how many he thought there was of them. If what he says is right, there can't be more than forty of 'em, so that means that we kin take care of 'em, I reckon."

"Yes, I reckon we can take care of them all right. But if we could only get there ahead of them they would not stand such a good chance of finding the way there. According to what the chief says, the people in the valley are not inclined to do much fighting, and if forty Apaches should get there and attack them, I suppose there would be quite a slaughter. He says the Lost Tribe numbers probably a hundred and fifty, and that instead of increasing it has decreased in number during the past ten years. I suppose if the Indians there were left alone the race would die out entirely in a few years."

"That's right," spoke up Lone Dog, who was listening to what was said. "That's why the princess wants to marry someone from the outside. Metahwa is a very wise maiden. She can see what will happen, and she wants to continue the race, as the palefaces say."

"You seem to have a pretty good education, Lone Dog," said Arietta, looking at the chief and smiling. "Sometimes you talk very much like the palefaces, while at others you drift into the way of speaking common to those of your race."

"I went to school and I was taught the ways of the white man," retorted the Indian. "But sometimes I forget. Yes, I have a fair education."

"Sometimes an education does an Injun good, an' sometimes it don't," observed the scout. "I reckon the most of 'em would be jest as well off if they didn't know nothin'. When they do learn a little they begin to think all the harder, an' then it sorter strikes them that they ain't bein' used right by the whites; an' then the first thing you know off they goes on ther rampage, lookin' for scalps an' blood. I'll say right here, Lone Dog, you're a putty good sort of an Injun. There ain't many like you, an' don't yer forgit it."

The chief was pleased at this, and he drew his supple form to its full height and nodded to the scout.

"Cheyenne Charlie no like the red men," he said. "Lone Dog find that out when he first see him. But he will like Lone Dog, for Lone Dog is honest and never tells a lie."

While they were talking Arietta, who was looking across the waste of land they had traveled the latter part of the afternoon, suddenly exclaimed:

"I see smoke about two miles back here, Wild. Look!"

Instantly the eyes of the young deadshot were turned in the direction she pointed, and, sure enough, he saw a

column of smoke rising above the top of a jagged cliff. "That's right, Et," he said quickly. I reckon the Apaches are after us. We're going to have a lively time of it to-night, or I'm much mistaken."

They all saw the smoke now, and a feeling of uneasiness came over them, all save our hero, who had expected something of the kind, and was prepared for it.

"As soon as it gets dark I reckon we'll go back there and see how many of them there are, Charlie," the young deadshot said. "There's nothing like knowing just what you have got to contend with, you know."

"That's just what I was thinkin', Wild," answered the scout, showing how willing he was to accompany the boy on the mission.

Darkness came, and then the two set out on foot.

Two miles was a short distance for them to travel on foot, as they were used to it, and could get over the ground fast when it was necessary.

There were so many rocks scattered about, while the ground was for the most part stony, that to proceed with their horses would have been to let the enemy know they were approaching.

By going on foot they could reach them without making a sound, and thus they might have a chance to spy upon the red fiends without being discovered.

Neither Wild nor Charlie ever made a mistake in a direction, after they had once located the point they wanted to get at.

Scarcely half an hour passed after leaving the camp before they spied a fire in a hollow between the jagged rocks.

"There they are, Charlie," whispered our hero. "Now then, I reckon we'll creep up there and see just how many there are of them, and how they are fixed."

"Right yer are, Wild," was the reply.

Using all their skill the two now crept toward the camp fire of the Apaches.

In a very few minutes they had reached a point that was so close to the fire that they could easily count the forms standing and sitting about it.

"Just about forty of them," said our hero after a pause. "Well, that is not so bad, Charlie. They have not got so much in the way of supplies, as far as I can see. I reckon we can thin them out pretty well if they take a notion to attack us to-night. But there's no use in interfering with them. Let them start the ball rolling, the same as they did the other night."

Just then a stealthy footfall sounded behind them, and turning quickly, they beheld a redskin stepping toward them with an uplifted ax.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOAL IS NEAR AT HAND.

Though they well knew the craftiness of the Apaches, and had expected they would have their camp well guarded, Young Wild West and the scout did not think they were going to be surprised by one of the redskins in that way.

But they were always prepared for such an emergency, and Wild took in the situation in an instant.

The redskin meant to kill them with the ax, or knock them senseless, and then take them prisoners.

He probably wanted the honor of doing it all to himself, and that was why he did not sound the alarm.

"Look out, Charlie!" whispered the young deadshot, as he pushed hard upon his companion to make him roll out of the way.

Then he leaped forward with the quickness of a catamount and caught the Indian by the ankles, just as the ax descended upon the spot he had been a second before.

The scout was missed by a foot or more, and when a quick wrench brought the redskin to the ground Charlie had his hand over his mouth in time to shut off the cry that was sure to come, unless prevented.

A gurgling gasp was all the Apache uttered, and then he was overpowered in a jiffy, Wild taking a hand in the game.

Though they were less than a hundred yards from the camp, Wild and Charlie proceeded to bind and gag their prisoner.

They knew pretty well that there were no more of them out there, so all they had to do was to keep him from sounding the alarm.

But with the muzzle of a revolver pressing hard against his forehead, the redskin was not going to make much of a fuss about it.

He knew he had made a miss of it, and he did not want to die just then.

"You will come with us," said Wild, placing his mouth close to the prisoner's ear and whispering the words. "If you want to die just try to let your gang know what has happened to you. You wanted to kill us, I reckon, but you were hardly quick enough. Now you come right on, and see that you tread very softly."

Charlie kept the revolver at his head, and the Indian was led away a couple of hundred feet, around some rocks that concealed the camp from view.

The heartless attempt upon their lives made Wild feel like changing his original programme somewhat.

He had merely intended to spy upon the camp and get what information he could, but now he decided to show his hand and cripple the band all he could.

"You stay here with the red galoot, Charlie," he said. "I am going to try and stampede their horses. I'll give them some work to do before they are ready to make an attack on our camp, and you can bet on that!"

"That's right, Wild. Go ahead. You kin bet I'll take good care of him."

Our hero now started to reach the horses of the Apaches.

He did not know just where they were, but he would soon locate them.

The boy had not been gone more than five minutes when Charlie became aware that someone was approaching in a stealthy manner.

It struck him that there must be another redskin prowling about.

He shot a quick glance at the prisoner he was in charge and then got ready to receive the prowler.

Knife in hand, the scout crept close to a rock and waited.

The next minute he saw a form stealing toward him in the darkness.

Making sure that it was not Wild coming back, Charlie gripped the handle of his knife firmly and made ready for business.

He did not mean to try and capture the redskin.

That was not his way of doing things, especially when he was left to use his own judgment.

The very fact that the Indians were after the scalps of himself and friends made him feel that he should kill every one of them who came in his way.

He was going to settle accounts with this one, and that in a hurry.

That the redskin must have heard or seen something that made him think that an enemy was there was evident, for he came in a very cautious manner.

In a few seconds he was close enough to see the form of the gagged Apache on the ground.

But Charlie was crouching in a shadow, and he did not see him.

"Ugh!" grunted the prowler in a very low tone of voice.

There was no answer, though the captive would have liked to give one, no doubt.

It must have been that the creeping redskin saw that it was one of his own kind, who was sitting there in silence, for after a short pause he again started for the spot.

He came to within a few feet of the prisoner, and then he again gave a guttural grunt.

Then it was that Cheyenne Charlie's strong arm descended.

His hunting knife reached the spot he aimed for, and with a gurgling gasp, the prowler rolled over.

"I reckon that's one less, anyhow," muttered the scout, as he put his hand over the mouth of his victim, so no cry might escape it.

It was all over in less than a minute, and during that time the prisoner squirmed and twisted.

What he would have done just then if he had possessed his freedom and a weapon can readily be guessed.

"Injun," said the scout, putting his mouth close to the ear of the Apache. "That's ther way I always does business. You galoots wants ther lives of all ther palefaces, an' I take pleasure in killin' ther bad Apaches. Now, I reckon yer know what kind of game you're up ag'in."

The redskin could not make a reply, of course, but the scout saw the flash in his eyes, which meant a whole lot.

The light that came from the bright stars overhead enabled him to see that.

There was a wait of perhaps five minutes after that when the sounds made by horses suddenly came to Charlie's ears.

Wild had succeeded in stampeding the horses!

That went without saying.

But how were they to make their escape, for the horses were coming that way.

The cries of the Indians now broke upon his ears with full force.

They had realized that they had been outwitted by an enemy, and that they were in danger of losing their ponies.

Crack—crack!

Two shots rang out, followed by wild yells of anger.

Crack—crack—crack!

Three more sounded very close by.

Charlie sprang to his feet, for he knew that it was Wild who had fired the last three shots.

The boy was coming that way, and it was more than likely that he was mounted upon one of the Indian's horses.

Such was indeed the case.

The dashing young deadshot had succeeded in his work in a way that told how well he was versed in such undertakings.

He had cut loose all the ponies in the camp without being discovered at it, and then mounting one of the animals, had set the others running away from the spot.

But he had bridled one of the steeds for Charlie, too.

The boy did not forget to do that.

What became of the prisoner they had taken he did not care, so long as they managed to get away.

The Apaches saw him as he rode past them, driving the ponies ahead, and then it was that two shots were fired at him.

The bullets came so uncomfortably close to him that Wild answered the shots with telling effect.

Three of the redskins went down.

He knew just where he had left Charlie with the prisoner, so he made straight for the spot.

With a long switch that he had cut for the purpose he struck the horses right and left, taking care to hold the one he had in reserve for the scout, so that it might not break away from him.

The startled steeds were going fast now, and that was what he wanted them to do.

Reaching the rocks behind which he had left his companion, he called out, sharply:

"Here you are, Charlie! I reckon we haven't any time to lose."

"I'm ready ter leave, Wild," was the reply, and the next minute Charlie had leaped upon the back of the horse.

Crang! Crack—crack! Cra-c-ck!

The Apaches were shooting fast and furious now, and the escaping two could hear the bullets humming about their heads.

Charlie fired a couple of shots back, but being unable to pick out his men to shoot at, he did nothing further in that line.

"That's right, Charlie," said our hero, when he saw him quit shooting. "There is no use in wasting your ammunition. It is too dark to shoot with any degree of accuracy. Wait until you can see them; then let them have it. But I reckon we won't see any more of them for a while, since it will be some time before they catch their horses. That was a clever trick I played on them. Why, some of the ponies are a hundred feet ahead of us now, and they are going like mad."

"Let 'em go," was the reply. "I hope ther red galoots don't never catch 'em."

Wild swung off to the left now, the scout following him, and then they rode hard.

They were riding bareback, but that made little difference. Both were master hands at handling horses, and they could go it any way.

The yells of the enraged Apaches began to grow fainter as they went on, and when a mile had been placed between them they could no longer hear them.

"That will let them know that we are not to be surprised by them, anyhow," said our hero, as he allowed the pace of his horse to slacken. "What did you do with the prisoner, Charlie?"

"Left him sittin' on ther ground, bound an' gagged," was the reply. "He had a dead one ter keep him company."

"A dead one!" echoed Wild.

"Yes, another red galoot come sneakin' up, an' I let him feel my knife, I wasn't goin' ter risk lettin' him give ther alarm, yer know, Wild."

"No, of course not. So there was another of them sneaking around, eh? They must have had their camp pretty well guarded, I reckon."

"But not well enough ter stop yer from stampedin' their horses, though," and Charlie gave a chuckle.

They were not long in reaching the camp.

They found those they had left there very anxious about them, for the air being clear, the reports of firearms had been heard by them.

Wild soon let them know just what had happened.

Lone Dog was as much pleased as anyone.

He seemed to think that Charlie had done exactly right in using his knife on the prowling Apache.

"I reckon it will be some little time before they get at us," said our hero. "So we may as well fix up things a little. There is nothing like being ready, you know. I hope they don't delay us in setting out to-morrow morning, for I am anxious to reach the wonderful Hidden Valley."

"Lone Dog find the way in the dark, Young Wild West," spoke up the Choctaw chief, placing his hand on the young deadshot's arm in a persuasive way. "We go now. In four hours we get there. Then we no have to fight the Apaches."

"By jingo! I believe that is a good plan, Lone Dog!" exclaimed the boy. "That is just what we will do. If you can find the way in the dark we will be able to fool the redskins. Get busy there, you Chinamen! Break camp and load the pack-horses."

The order was a rather unexpected one, but Hop and Wing lost no time in getting to work.

But all hands hastened to help, and in less time than one would think it would take they were ready to leave the spot.

Wild and Charlie had turned the two horses they had escaped from the Indian camp with out, but when they started away the animals seemed to want to go with them, so they did not attempt to drive them back.

As they rode on up the rugged ascent the moon arose, and then they could better see the way.

The Choctaw chief rode well in advance with Wild, so they could pick the way for the rest, and thus make no delays.

On they went for two hours, not stopping longer than ten minutes during that time.

The Indian kept insisting that he knew the way, and that they were traveling just right, so our hero was feeling pretty easy.

It was seldom that our friends traveled much after dark, but they minded it little, especially as they were all eager to reach the Hidden Valley.

It was a little over three hours from the time they had broken camp and set out, when the Choctaw chief pointed to a dark opening between two cliffs and exclaimed:

"That is the way, Young Wild West. The eyes of Lone Dog are true. He has made no mistake. We go under the ground for half an hour, and then we come to the valley. Two minutes from here we must cross on a bridge, if it there now. Then we pull bridge on the other side and go on."

"But suppose the bridge is not there, Lone Dog?" asked Wild.

"That will be very much bad," was the reply, with a shrug of the shoulders.

The word was passed to those behind them and they started through the passage.

But at that very moment a savage yell sounded close at hand, and they knew the Apaches were coming.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HIDDEN VALLEY.

The fact that the Apaches had reached the spot so soon was not a little surprising, but Young Wild West always knew exactly what to do at the right time.

"Move ahead lively!" he exclaimed. "Charlie, you come back here with me. We'll cover a retreat. Jim, light a lantern, so Lone Dog can find the way. I reckon the red galoots will never get in here alive before we reach the spot where the bridge is."

Charlie at once dropped back at the side of the young deadshot, while the rest hurried through the passage.

Crack—crack—crack!

Three rifle shots rang out just then, followed by more yelling.

But our friends were simply firing to try and frighten them.

Carefully covering the retreat of those ahead of them, Wild and Charlie went along through the passage.

Though the Apaches could not be very far away, as their yelling would indicate, they saw nothing of them.

"I reckon they ain't found ther passage, Wild," said the scout, in a whisper. "It ain't everyone as would think that there was sich a thing here. Lone Dog knowed it was here, and that's why we found it so easy."

"Maybe you're right, Charlie," was the reply. "But if they haven't found it, they soon will, most likely. The only thing that worries me now is that the bridge Lone Dog spoke of may not be there. In that case we will be hemmed in, and in a bad fix."

"Well, if no one's been here since the Choctaw chief come away from ther valley ther bridge must sartinly be there. He'll find it all right."

The yelling of the savage hoard outside continued, though it did not seem to be any closer.

In fact, as they went on through the passage the sounds grew less distinct.

Young Wild West was much relieved at this.

While he was never afraid to fight a foe, it was always best to get along without it, if such a thing was possible.

He had no liking for slaying even savage redskins who were after their scalps.

When they had covered perhaps a hundred yards they heard an exultant cry ahead of them.

Both knew very well that it came from the Choctaw chief, and that meant that he had found the bridge.

Around a sharp bend the two went, and then they saw a lighted lantern in the hand of Jim Dart, who had dismounted.

Lone Dog was on his feet also, while the rest of the party sat on their horses.

The Indian was busy up-ending the bridge he had spoken of.

It was a rather crude affair, constructed of poles that were bound together with stout thongs of buckskin and rawhide.

As soon as he saw that Wild and Charlie were coming Jim put the lantern on the ground and ran to assist the chief.

The bridge was about fifteen feet in length, and though lightly constructed, was strong enough to permit the passage of a horse and rider.

There was a long rope thong attached to either end, and telling Jim to hold fast to the one that should be on that side of the chasm, the Indian pushed the bridge until it lost its balance, and then allowed the other end to drop down.

The chasm itself was nearly twelve feet in width, so this did not give much of a hold for the bridge on either side.

As Wild looked at it he felt that it certainly was not a very safe way to get to the other side.

But there was no help for it now, as they must go on, or be held in the passage by the fiendish redskins, who were outside clamoring for their lives.

Jim left it to the Choctaw chief, and soon the latter declared that the bridge was ready to be crossed.

Then, without another word, he took his horse by the bridle and stepped boldly upon the frail structure.

It trembled and gave beneath his weight, and when the horse stepped upon it it bent down so much that it surely seemed in danger of slipping from one side or the other.

But no such thing happened, and the Indian and horse crossed in safety.

Once on the other side, Lone Dog quickly made the thong fast to a jutting point of rock, but being careful to hold it taught, so he could take in any slack and keep the bridge from slipping on that end.

Seeing this, Jim quickly did the same thing at the other end.

This made the bridge quite substantial, as the thongs were surely strong enough to hold the weight of a horse and rider, and more if it were necessary.

"Send the Chinee men over first," said Lone Dog. "The pack-horses will follow them."

Wing was afraid to go, so Hop, who always wanted to show how brave he was, promptly rode over.

The moment he was on the other side Cheyenne Charlie started the pack-horse that he was leading, and he went across willingly.

Thus encouraged, Wing took the chances of riding over, and when he was across the other pack-horse followed.

"The paleface maidens next," said the Choctaw chief.

Without waiting for any more instruction, Arietta rode across the bridge.

The scout's wife went next, and then came Eloise.

Wild took hold of the thong that Jim was attending to and told him to lead his horse over.

The boy did so and then our hero nodded to the scout, who promptly crossed the bridge.

There were still two horses which were loaded with the things that had been taken when the raid had been made upon the Apache camp two nights before, and looking at the chief, Wild said:

"How about these horses, Lone Dog?"

"You come on across, and then I'll come and get them," was the reply.

Wild took his sorrel stallion by the bit and crossed the bridge.

Strange to say, none of the horses had shown any fear about crossing.

But this was probably due to the fact that they had been through all sorts of danger, and were trained to meet almost any conditions.

As soon as he was over Wild nodded to the Choctaw chief, and with a grin of satisfaction, Lone Dog quickly ran over the frail bridge.

One at a time, he led the two horses across.

Then he went back, and unfastening the thong that held the end of the bridge to that side, he came lightly across, and said to Jim:

"Now we pull the bridge this side and hide it. The rocks are plenty all the way from the passage to this place, and the Apaches no see the tracks of our horses. They no find where we go."

"I reckon that's right," the boy answered, and then he assisted in pulling the bridge over the chasm.

They carried it back into the darkness and placed it behind a clump of rocks, and when this was done Lone Dog gave an exclamation of triumph.

"I reckon yer feel purty good now, eh, Chief?" observed the scout, as he smiled at him. "Ther blamed Apaches ain't goin' ter git us right away, are they?"

"They have to be very sharp if they find where we are going," was the reply. "Maybe they find the trail, and maybe not. Now we go on down through the dark underground passage, and in less than half an hour we get into the Hidden Valley."

"Well, I'll be mighty glad when we get there, though I ain't goin' ter say that I was much afraid of them redskins out there. I reckon we could have handled them all right."

As there was no danger of being seen by spying eyes, our hero suggested that another lantern be lighted.

This was done, and then mounting their horses, as Lone Dog advised them to, they rode through a crooked passage for perhaps two hundred feet, the Indian taking the lead.

The passage was hardly wide enough for two to ride abreast, so they did not attempt it, but rode in single file.

When they had gone a mile further they noticed that they were going downward.

A couple of hundred feet further on and the way became so steep that the horses had to fairly brace themselves to keep from sliding.

It was all hard rock they were upon, too, but it was rather rough, and this enabled the animals to hold their feet.

There was no doubt that the passage was one that had been made by nature, since it was crooked and narrow in some spots, while at others it broadened in the form of a cavern.

If our friends had had no one to guide them they would have been many times at a loss as to which way to proceed, but Lone Dog knew the way and he kept right on.

Downward they went, turning this way and that, but all the time going downward.

When Wild figured that they must have covered at least four miles the Choctaw chief suddenly raised his hand and exclaimed:

"In five minutes we see all the stars and the moon. The Hidden Valley is right before us."

"Come!" answered our hero. "I reckon this is going to be one of the sort of adventures that we don't have very often. If we don't have any fighting to do, we'll certainly see and learn something, anyhow."

They went on down the incline, the passage gradually broadening as they proceeded, and in a very few minutes they came to the end of it.

As they emerged the odor of sweet-scented flowers and fruits came to their nostrils, making a welcome change to the damp, stifling air in the underground passage.

"Young Wild West, we are here," said Lone Dog, speaking in a tone of voice that was almost akin to awe. "Me don't know what the princess will say when me tell her that she is to take the Chinee or Lone Dog for her husband. Maybe she be mad, and then she will punish me."

"I reckon that part will be all right," Wild answered, nodding his head confidently. "You can try her with Hop, and if she don't take to him, she surely will to you. I have an idea that she meant for you to offer yourself to her, anyhow. I reckon you must have been a little slow, Lone Dog."

"You think that, Young Wild West?"

The chief looked at the boy earnestly, as though he thought there might be something in what he said.

"Well, it rather strikes me that if a woman or girl tells a man to go and find a suitable lover for her, and leaves it all to him, she would most likely be satisfied to have him, and just does it to give him a hint to that effect. I don't know the ways of Indian princesses of Lost Tribes, though. You do as I say. Just tell her that perhaps Hop will do for her, and if she says no, ask how you will do. Of course you won't do this unless you are satisfied to marry her, though."

"Oh! Lone Dog would like to have Metahwa for his wife. He likes her more than he can say. But he afraid to tell her so when here before."

"That's just it. You were a little too slow, I reckon. Well, we'll soon fix things up when we find these people. How far have we got to go before we find them?"

They had come to a halt now, and the conversation between Wild and the Choctaw chief could be heard by all hands.

But no one offered to say anything, since they thought it was a subject that the Indian was more interested in than they were, though they could not help listening, and all wondered how it was going to turn out.

Lone Dog said the village of the Lost Tribe was less than two miles distant, but he suggested that they go into camp and stay where they were until morning.

Our hero thought it advisable to do as he said, as it would be better to meet the isolated people in the daylight, anyhow.

In spite of the fact that the Choctaw said they were not of a fighting disposition, there was no telling what would happen.

There was no doubt but that the tribe was armed, though it might be that their weapons were crude, since they were trying to live as the Aztecs had done years and years before them.

There was gold, silver and jewels there, so Lone Dog said, and this was quite an incentive to go to the place.

But while Young Wild West and his friends always liked to find a treasure whenever they could, they were so well fixed in the way of money that they did not really need riches.

However, they never threw anything aside, when it was waiting for them to simply take it.

Wild selected a spot a short distance from the opening of the passage and ordered the Chinamen to put the camp in shape as quickly as possible.

The two went right at it, and with the assistance of the others, everything was soon in proper shape.

There was water at hand, and this came in nicely, since what they had with them was rather warm.

"Now then," said our hero, nodding to his partners, "I reckon everything is all right, if the Apaches don't find a way to get through the passage. If they happen to find that we came that way they will surely devise a means to get over the chasm. They will give us far more trouble than the Lost Tribe will if they do come here. We have got to be on the lookout for them, boys."

"Let 'em alone!" exclaimed the scout. "We've got lots of cartridges, an' if we have ter use 'em on bad redskins, all right. That's ther best way ter git rid of 'em, anyhow."

Though Lone Dog assured them that it was hardly possible that they would be disturbed by any of the inhabitants of the valley, Wild did not neglect to keep the usual watch.

The night passed in peace and quietness and when morning dawned those who were asleep were awakened

by the singing of the birds in the fertile little valley that was hidden from the outside world.

CHAPTER VII.

HOP PAYS A VISIT TO THE PALACE.

Young Wild West and the Choctaw chief had taken the last trick at guard duty, and they were of course awake when the singing of the birds of the valley aroused the others.

It certainly was a beautiful spot they had entered and our hero was much impressed with it.

For two or three miles the level valley stretched out, and all sorts of fruits of the semi-tropics grew there in abundance.

In some parts the land was tilled, and the corn was almost ready to cut.

Off to the right was a thick growth of palms, while here and there the olive tree could be seen in full bloom.

Lone Dog seemed to be delighted when he noticed that our hero was much impressed with the scene of beauty that was so beautifully surrounded by the high cliffs.

"You like the Hidden Valley, Young Wild West?" he said questioningly.

"Yes, Lone Dog. It certainly is a fine place, especially when you consider what lies outside of it. But I have seen similar places before, and I am not surprised at this one. Now then, if the Lost Tribe, as you call the inhabitants here, are friendly to us, everything will go along all right. But since you were not told to fetch a party here, it may be that we will not be received very well."

The Indian shrugged his shoulders.

"The Princess Metahwa did not tell me to bring but one," he answered. "But she tell me that her people no make fight with the palefaces. They all fear the Apaches, for they know they are very bad, and that they will kill and steal. If I make a mistake in bringing you here I will be very sorry, Young Wild West."

"Well, that's all right, Lone Dog. I reckon we'll manage it all right, anyhow, even though they don't like us."

Arietta came and joined them just then.

The girl's eyes were bright with the pleasure she felt at looking upon the surroundings.

"Oh, Wild!" she exclaimed. "Isn't this a lovely spot? Who would have ever thought that such a place could exist in the heart of this desert and rocks and sand. Just look at the beautiful flowers and hear the singing of those birds. Why, this is a regular paradise."

"It certainly is, Et," the boy answered, nodding his approval to what she said. "But you know we have seen similar places before, so there is nothing so strange about it, after all. There are lots of beautiful places in this region of the country that the eyes of the white man has never seen. It may be that we are the first to look upon this."

"That's right, Young Wild West," spoke up the Choctaw chief. "No palefaces ever see the Hidden Valley before."

"Well, I reckon we will have a good look at it before we leave, and then we will have something to tell about when we get back to civilization."

When our hero saw that all hands were up he called out to the cook to go ahead and get the breakfast ready.

"Me allee samee makee fire, Misler Wild?" asked Wing, as though he did not know whether it would be advisable for him to do it or not.

"Yes, go ahead. I reckon that will be the best way. If the natives of this place see the smoke they will no doubt come to us, and then we will have a chance to get acquainted with them."

There was plenty of dry brushwood scattered about, and it was not long before the cook had a good fire going.

Then he put a pot of coffee over the blaze and got the venison steaks ready to broil.

The scout's wife assisted him in preparing the breakfast, and made some of the corn muffins, which she was famous for.

The result was that in a little over half an hour they had as fine a breakfast as one could wish to sit down to.

All this time Wild and his partners were keeping a watch around for the approach of any of the inhabitants who might have been attracted by the fire and smoke.

They did not forget to cast an occasional look in the direction of the mouth of the passage they had come through, for, somehow, they thought it possible that the Apaches might find a way to get into the valley.

Before he sat down to breakfast Wild walked over to this place, but soon became satisfied that there was no possible way of closing it, since it was very wide, and there were not enough rocks that could be handled in the vicinity to perform any sort of barricade.

He looked upon the rocky ground, and when he saw that the marks of their horses' hoofs could be seen here and there he shrugged his shoulders uneasily.

If he could notice such marks the Apaches certainly could, too.

But he said nothing about it just then, and joined the others at breakfast.

They had just about finished eating when a dozen or more Indians were seen approaching from the woods at the right.

They were not attired like the Indians they were accustomed to meeting, but wore gowns that were gorgeous, to say the least.

Nearly all of them had their heads bedecked with feathers, and the robes upon them were of all the bright colors that could be imagined.

"They come," said Lone Dog, solemnly. "They are some of the picked ones of the Lost Tribe. They have seen the smoke from our campfire, and they have come to meet us."

"Well, that's just what I wanted them to do, Lone Dog," answered our hero. "Now then, we will soon see how friendly they are."

The Indians came right along, two abreast, and not until they were within fifty feet of the little camp did they halt to form themselves into a line like trained soldiers.

Then it was that Wild touched the Choctaw chief on the arm and said:

"Come on, Lone Dog. I reckon now is the time for you to have a talk with those fellows. If you can make them understand, which I suppose you can, you can go ahead and tell them why you brought us here."

The Indian nodded, and then he started boldly for the waiting Indians.

Wild walked a few feet behind him, making sure that his revolvers were ready for instant use, as he did not know just how they might be received.

As they approached the Indian, who stood at the head of the line, he stepped out and bowed low to the strangers.

That he was some sort of a chief was evident by his gaudy head-dress, the feathers of which nearly came down to his heels.

"I have come back, as the Princess Metahwa told me to, Chief," said Lone Dog, as he returned the salute.

He spoke in the Apache tongue, and Wild understood enough to know what he said.

"You bring palefaces with you, Lone Dog," replied the chief, straightening his form and looking anything but pleased. "The princess did not tell you to bring palefaces to the Hidden Valley."

"She did not tell me to bring palefaces; neither did she tell me not to bring palefaces," the Choctaw chief answered, rather stiffly. "I would see the princess and then I will tell her why I bring the palefaces to the Hidden Valley."

"It is well. Lone Dog and the paleface boy will come to the princess. The rest of the palefaces will stay where they are until she has decided that they can remain here."

All this Wild could understand quite well, and though he knew he was taking a little risk in going with them, he quickly decided to accompany the chief and meet the princess of the Lost Tribe.

Turning to his companions, Wild called out:

"I am going with Lone Dog to have an interview with the Princess Metahwa. I reckon it is all right, so you can stay here until you hear from me. Of course if I am gone longer than you think I should be, that's another thing. You can use your own judgment in that event."

"Be careful, Wild," admonished Arietta. "You may be treading on dangerous ground."

"That's all right. You know I am never afraid to venture on dangerous ground. I reckon we can fix this thing up all right. If we can see the ruler of the valley it won't take long to convince her that we are all right. Take it easy, everybody. I won't be gone very long."

Then the chief of the Indians of the Lost Tribe formed into a double line, taking care to place Wild and the Choctaw chief next to the two leaders.

The chief then gave the word and the march toward the woods was begun.

Not a word did any of them say, and they scarcely seemed to notice the newcomers.

This showed that they were well-trained and under good discipline.

Wild took notice that all of them were armed with stone hatchets and bows and arrows, which showed that they preferred the crude weapons of the Aztecs to those of modern times.

Nothing like a gun or an up-to-date knife could be seen upon them.

The woods was not much more than a quarter of a mile distant, and soon they had passed a bend and disappeared from the view of those they had left at the camp.

"I don't exactly like this sort of business," observed Cheyenne Charlie, turning to Jim and the girls. "I reckon Wild oughter have got 'em ter take ther whole bunch of us along. If anything happens ter be wrong we'd stand a much better show if we was all together."

"That's so, Charlie," admitted Jim, who was also a little shaky about the existing conditions. "But we'll leave that to Wild. He always knows what he is doing, I reckon."

While they were talking Hop Wah slipped off in the bushes.

His curiosity was aroused to the highest pitch, and he was so anxious to see the people of the Lost Tribe that he took occasion to sneak off unobserved.

Probably he knew that if he asked permission to go it would not have been granted.

The clever Chinaman always relied on his ability to perform magic tricks to carry him through safely, and he guessed that what the Indians in the Hidden Valley knew of magic did not amount to a great deal.

They were surely a superstitious set of people, as far as he could judge, and those were the sort he could get along a great deal better with.

Small feats of magic would seem wonderful to them, while to those accustomed to seeing such things it would seem to be really nothing.

Hop always carried plenty of material to aid him in performing his wonderful tricks, and when he slipped away from the camp now he was well provided with such.

He had been careful to note the direction the Indians came from, so he took a short cut, dodging along the open spaces and running swiftly when he got among the trees.

By doing this he was not long in getting ahead of Wild and the Choctaw chief and their escorts.

Finding a broad path that showed signs of having been traveled upon much, the clever Chinaman followed this until he came in sight of a crude village that nestled at the north end of the valley, with towering cliffs on all sides but one.

Some of the cliffs overhung the place at a height of two or three hundred feet, and beneath them the vegetation was not nearly as luxuriant as that out where the sun could strike it.

But Hop was not looking for a certain kind of vegetation just then.

He was bent upon being the first to find out what kind of a place the Indian village was, and what sort of people lived there.

The moment he came in sight of the column of thatched huts he became very careful and worked his way slightly to the left where a dense growth of palms extended right to within a few feet of the first of the buildings.

When Hop reached the nearest of these he crouched behind a clump of bushes and took a good look.

He could see men, women and children around the

huts, and all were attired in the semi-barbaric fashion of the ancient Aztecs.

Of course Hop had never seen the ancient Aztecs, but he had traveled around a lot and had listened to what others said.

As the reader knows, he was a very clever Chinaman with a remarkable memory.

It did not take him long to pick out the building that was no doubt occupied by the princess, for there was but one there that had any sort of a pretentious air about it.

This was built of blocks of stone, rather crudely, but imposing, notwithstanding.

The roof was of some sort of straw, thatched like the others.

Close to this was a tree with branches that came nearly to the ground, making it easy to climb.

Just why the Chinaman took the notion to climb this tree, so he might be enabled to get upon the roof of the stony structure, is hard to tell.

But that was the thought that stuck him just then, and he lost no time in setting it into practice.

It was not an easy thing to steal to the tree without being observed in the village, but Hop was used to that sort of thing, and before the Indians, with Wild and the Choctaw chief, came in sight, he reached the rear of the building and promptly ascended the tree.

It was easy to crawl out upon a limb and reach the roof, which was nearly flat in shape, sloping from the front to the rear.

As he let himself gently down upon the roof, it occurred to him right away that it was in a rotten condition.

It creaked and snapped under his weight, and shaking his head, he reached up to catch hold of the limb again, as he knew he was in danger of falling through.

But the effort in doing this put a little more strain on the rotten roof, and the result was a crash.

Down went the Chinaman through the top of the building.

Crash!

He landed with a loud noise right in the center of the building upon some pottery that was piled there.

"Hip hi!" he exclaimed, in dismay. "Whattee mattee? Me allee samee fallee thlough um roof, so be! Misler Wild! Misler Wild! Help!"

He was not hurt much, and as he scrambled to his feet while uttering his cries for help two Indian squaws, who were no doubt the servants of the real householder, came running into the room.

The appearance of the Chinaman was quite enough to excite their fears, and not pausing long enough to take a good look at him they rushed outside, screaming at the top of their voices.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISONERS BEFORE THE PRINCESS.

Young Wild West and the Choctaw chief marched along, keeping time with the tread of the Indians.

As they neared the little village of the Lost Tribe our hero whispered to Lone Dog:

"They're a mighty quiet lot, Chief. I wonder why they don't have anything to say to us? It strikes me that we are not going to get a very good reception from the princess."

Lone Dog shook his head, but said nothing in reply.

He seemed to be in a state of awe, and evidently he did not want to do anything that would go against the feelings of the Indians.

Our hero smiled, and then he decided to let it go at that until they reached the princess.

It was not long before they rounded the turn in the well-beaten path they struck after entering the woods, before the crude village came in sight.

Wild could see the men, women and children of the village, the latter playing about before the houses after the fashion of those to be found in ordinary Indian villages of the different tribes.

As he had seen the costumes supposed to be worn by the ancient Aztecs, it was not difficult for him to understand that these people were but imitators of them.

When they got a little nearer the whole population turned out, it seemed, and lined either side of the roadway.

This was proof enough that they all knew that the visitors had reached the Hidden Valley.

But no sounds came from them, whatever.

As if they had been instructed to do so, they remained perfectly quiet.

"A rather peculiar way to greet us, I reckon," remarked our hero, again addressing the Choctaw chief.

Lone Dog shook his head, but, as before, said nothing in reply.

The roadway was broad and straight, and past the little huts that were around either side of it the procession wended its way.

Wild saw that one of the buildings was of stone, and more pretentious than any of the rest, and that it stood right at the end of the avenue, if such it could be called.

It was easy for him to guess that this was the palace, if such it was called, of those who lived in the Hidden Valley.

As they came to this building the chief leading them came to a halt and gave a sharp command in his own language.

Then the Indians broke and lined themselves on either side of the roadway, facing each other and leaving Wild and the Choctaw chief standing in the center.

It was just then that Hop Wah took his tumble through the roof of the palace, and when his sharp cries for help rang out our hero was somewhat astonished.

He saw some of the squaws, who were standing about the front of the building, rush inside, and then come out again screaming at the top of their voices.

If our hero was astonished, Lone Dog was dismayed, for he easily recognized the voice as belonging to the Chinaman.

"Hop has come to spoil all, Young Wild West," he said, in a hoarse whisper. "Now we may be killed and offered as a sacrifice by the Lost Tribe. The Indians here don't like such things. The Chinee shouldn't have come."

"That's right; he should not have come, sure enough. But since he did, I reckon there aren't going to be any sacrifice made just now. Come on, we'll go ahead and see what's the matter."

Wild leaped forward on a run, and reached the door of the stone building, before anybody tried to stop him.

As he rushed inside he could hardly suppress a laugh, for Hop was sitting on a sort of throne that was at one end of the big room on the ground floor of the palace.

But that was not all!

On his head was a golden crown, while in his mouth was stuck a big, black cigar, which he was calmly puffing away at.

Hop had been very quick to act the moment he recovered from his fright at having fallen through the roof.

When he saw the squaws running out screaming at the top of their voices, he knew that something was likely to happen.

He had shot a quick glance about the room, and seeing the throne, which was a rather gaudy, not to say expensive affair, he resolved to play the part of a ruler, for a while at least.

The crown was right there, so he had but to grasp it and put it upon his head.

Seating himself on the throne, he made himself ready to receive anyone who might enter.

While he had hardly expected to see Young Wild West come in, he was not a little pleased when he did see him.

"Hop, what are you doing there?" demanded our hero, sternly.

"Me allee samee comee to see whattee mattee here, so be, Misler Wild," was the quick retort. "Me climbee um tlee and gettee on um loof; um loof allee samee bleak in and me fallee down and bleak plenty flower-pots, so be. But me allee light now; me allee samee king. Hip hi! Hoolay!"

"I reckon you'll be something besides a king in about a minute or two," replied our hero, who could not help smiling, for the Chinaman certainly looked comical sitting there on the throne.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when in rushed a dozen or more Indians.

They were those who had escorted our hero and the Choctaw chief there, and they had scarcely got inside when others came pouring in after them.

But Hop was quite equal to the emergency.

He had expected to see lots of the inhabitants of the Hidden Valley come in, so there was nothing surprising about it to him.

He arose to his feet, and then calmly took a big firecracker from one of the many pockets his loose-fitting coat contained on the inside.

He quickly lighted the fuse of the cracker and then tossed it to the floor before him, at the same time making a gracious bow.

Bang!

A report sounded that fairly shook the building, and instantly the place became filled with a stifling smoke.

It was not an ordinary firecracker that the Chinaman had exploded; it was one of the kind that he sometimes made himself, and it contained a chemical that would make a dense smoke that was of a very pungent, not to say disgusting odor.

Whether it was from the denseness of the smoke or the odor, it cannot be said, but, anyhow, the natives of the Hidden Valley made a rush to get out really faster than they had come in.

Wild dropped close to the floor, he knowing that he would escape the smoke there by keeping his mouth furthest away from it.

"How lat, Misler Wild?" chirped the clever Chinaman, from the throne. "Lat makee um foolish galoots allee samee lightee out, so be. Hip hi! Hoolay! Me allee samee velly smartee Chinee!"

"I reckon you had better get out of here right away, Hop," retorted Wild, in a low tone of voice. "They may take a notion to kill you for that. If you can't get out, hide somewhere, anyhow. I'll go on back and take my chances. I'm sorry you came here, but since you have, you can bet your life I'll stick to you."

So saying, the dashing young deadshot crept to the doorway and then arose to his feet and walked outside.

He knew very well that Hop would find some place to hide, so he did not fear so much on his account.

As he got outside he found quite a crowd gathered there.

He saw the Choctaw chief standing about where he had left him, and the look on his face was one of deep concern.

Wild pushed his way past those who were running about before the door of the stone building and joined him.

"What is it, Young Wild West?" queried Lone Dog. "The Chinee is in there."

"He certainly was in there," was the reply. "But just where he is now I don't know. Hop is a peculiar sort of fellow, you know; and he is rather inquisitive, too. He got upon the roof and fell through it. That is how he came to get in, I reckon."

"Did he kill any of the Lost Tribe?"

"Oh, no! There was no occasion for that, I reckon. He just set off a firecracker to frighten them, that's all."

Meanwhile the excitement kept up.

The male members of the tribe kept running back and forth before the palace, though none of them ventured inside.

The probabilities are that they were afraid to, since the explosion, with the blinding smoke following it, had set them in fear.

Suddenly a sharp whistle sounded.

Instantly all became quiet.

"The silver whistle of the princess," said Lone Dog, in a low tone, and not looking at our hero.

"I reckon she has got pretty good control over the gang," Wild answered, as he saw those who had conducted them to the spot turn and march away toward the mouth of a big cave with soldier-like precision.

But as these men, who might have been called the royal guard, went away, others appeared and surrounded our hero and Lone Dog.

They were armed in the same way as the others, though they did not act at all in a threatening manner.

"We would like to have an audience with the princess,"

said Wild, speaking in the Indian tongue as well as he could, and acting very cool about it. "Don't think that we came here for any evil purpose, for we did not. Lone Dog brought us here to save us from the bad Apaches, who are on the other side of the high, rocky ridge. We are all right, and you can bet on it!"

The majority of them understood partly what he said. But none of them offered to make a reply.

Wild could see the women and children peeping from the doors and windows of the huts, and they showed that they were thoroughly alarmed.

He waved his hand assuringly to them and then shook his head to indicate that he had no idea of doing wrong to anyone.

But they did not appear to take this for granted.

"How long have we got to wait here, Lone Dog?" he asked, after about five minutes had passed. "I am getting a little tired of this."

"We will soon know what we have to do, Young Wild West," was the reply.

"Well, I call this a mighty queer sort of reception from a race that does not make war on the palefaces. Why, we are virtually prisoners, and have been since we started to come here with a squad of fancy-dressed redskins."

"Everything be all right if the Chinee no get into the palace," answered the Choctaw chief, with a shake of his head. "Now it be very bad with us, maybe."

"Maybe it will, but I am not going to be disarmed without showing them the sort of an American boy I am."

"If they want to take pistols and knives, let them take them!" cried Lone Dog, earnestly. "Don't kill any of them. Don't hurt them in any way. That will make things very bad. Then they make you be burned alive as a sacrifice to the Fire God."

"Oh, they are fire worshipers, are they? Well, I reckon I don't want to be offered up as a sacrifice, and I don't intend to be. You leave that to Hop. He is around here somewhere, and you can bet he'll block any kind of game like that."

Just then six of the Indians came out of the cave-like opening, walking as solemn as could be.

Straight to Young Wild West and the Choctaw chief they came, and without a word, seized them by the arms.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wild, as he easily wrenched himself loose. "I reckon I don't want any of that. I'll go with you, but you don't need to grip me by the arms that way."

Just then one of them, who got behind him, deftly slipped a noose about one of his arms.

A quick jerk turned the boy half around, and then before he hardly knew it his other wrist was seized.

It took three of them to get his wrists bound together, however, and they seemed to be very glad when they had it done.

Wild gave in when he saw it was no use.

He looked at Lone Dog and found that he, too, had his hands tied behind him.

But the Choctaw chief had submitted to it without even making a protest in words.

The weapons were taken from both the prisoner now, and then, with an Indian on either side of him, our hero was led toward what seemed to be a cave.

Lone Dog came behind him in a similar way.

But Wild soon found it was not a cave, but simply a passage that ran a few yards under the cliff and then came out again at the other side of the palace.

As Young Wild West and the Choctaw chief were led from the underground place by the Indians they beheld the beautiful princess of the Lost Tribe standing upon a stone dais.

"Listen!" she said, dramatically. "You came unbidden to the Hidden Valley, and the penalty is death!"

She spoke in excellent English, and our hero was not a little surprised.

"That's all right, Princess," he said, in his cool and easy way, and bowing politely. "I reckon when you have heard our story you will change your mind and not have us put to death. You will be very glad we came here, when you understand the danger that threatens you and your people from the bad Apaches."

The boldness of the boy fairly staggered the fair being, and the attendants, who stood with spears on either side of her, acted as though they were going to faint.

Wild took in the situation at a glance.

He knew that it was his wonderful coolness that was counting now, and he meant to show the princess of the Lost Tribe and her followers that he was no more afraid of them than he was of the most common redskins in the world.

CHAPTER IX.

WILD GAINS HIS FREEDOM.

Hop lost no time in hiding himself when Wild went out of the stone building that was called the palace.

There were several nooks and crannies to the big room, and doors showed that there must be chambers off from it.

Still keeping on the crown, which was quite heavy, as it was made of gold, the clever Chinaman made for one of the doors.

He did not know what he might find there, but he was taking chances, and anything would go.

It happened that it was a room where the gaudy costumes worn by the attendants of the princess were kept.

The room was not more than ten feet square, and all around it, save for the door and a window, the uniforms and appurtenances were hanging from copper hooks.

Hop gave a nod of satisfaction when he saw all this.

Then he softly closed the door and looked to see if it could be locked.

There was no such thing as a lock on it, so he sought other means of keeping it shut.

Long spears and other crude weapons were piled about in the room, so he quickly utilized some of them to fasten the door by bracing them against it.

This done, he went to the window and peered out.

He saw three or four fancy tepees there, and standing before the central one was a very beautiful Indian maiden attired in royal costume.

"Lat um lovely plincess, allee light," Hop muttered, as he peeped from the window.

He was right on this, for just then the girl blew the blast upon the silver whistle, which brought her attendants to her in a hurry.

Hop saw them come out of what appeared to be a cave, but he did not wonder much at this.

He was used to seeing queer things, and he made it a point to keep cool when they came.

While the beautiful princess was talking to the attendants about the queer explosion, and of the arrival of Lone Dog and the palefaces, Hop proceeded to attire himself in the garb of the attendants.

He had a good chance, and plenty of garments to pick from, so it was not long before he was fixed up in great shape, headgear and all.

Then he decided to wait and see what would happen.

It was not long that he had to wait, either.

The attendants were busy fixing up a sort of throne outside the palace, which showed that the princess did not care to come in where the explosion took place.

But the fact was, as our friends learned later, that the Princess Metahwa preferred to live in the tepees, and only once during a moon did she hold court in the palace her father, the late king of the Hidden Valley, had constructed.

The story of the Chinaman's appearance had disturbed her a great deal, but she must satisfy her followers by having Lone Dog and his paleface companion brought before her, no matter what else happened.

When they were brought before her, and the princess uttered the words that condemned Young Wild West to death, Hop was peeping at the scene and taking in all that was said.

He was greatly surprised to hear the girl speak in English, and he began to think that she was nothing more than a make-believe princess.

But when he heard Wild talking to her he grinned and gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Misler Wild allee samee makee um fool ledskins findee outee he no 'flaid, so be," he muttered. "But how um ledskins tie uppee him hands? Lat velly stlange."

Just then the princess spoke again.

"What story have you to tell?" she asked, looking at our hero in a way that told how interested she was in what he said.

"How is it you speak my language, Princess?" Wild answered by asking another question.

"My father taught me. I have the books of the palefaces in plenty, and there are members of my tribe who talk with me."

"Ah! I see. Well, if you want to find out anything from me you will just order your fancy-looking attendants to untie my hands. I can't talk with my hands tied, you know."

"You are a very brave boy, it seems," and there was a look of admiration in the eyes of the girl. "You have been condemned to death, and yet you keep very cool and show indifference."

"Well, I reckon being condemned to death is one thing, and dying is another. I have been condemned to death so many times that I can't remember them all. But here I am, alive and well yet."

The princess looked at him as though she did not know just how to take him.

But Wild did not show the least concern, other than that he wanted his hands free.

He now walked boldly to the raised platform of stone the princess was standing on, and turning his back to her, said:

"I reckon you had better go ahead and cut me loose, Metahwa. Maybe you'll be sorry later on if you don't do it."

The attendants scowled at the boy fiercely, but he paid no attention to them.

There was a short silence and then the princess took a knife from under her robe and severed the cords that held Wild's hands behind him.

"Thank you," he said, coolly; and then he walked back to his former position and faced her. "You are all right, Metahwa. Now I will talk to you. You said a little while ago that we came unbidden to the Hidden Valley; I say we didn't. Your friend, Lone Dog, the Choctaw chief, invited us to come here, and we came. A lot of bad Apaches were after us, and we had to get away from them, anyhow. They are looking for a way to get here, because they want to clean out this place and take all the gold and silver there is in it. They found that Lone Dog knew about this place, and they caught him, and were going to torture him to death, when we happened along and saved him. Lone Dog is a fine Indian, one of the best I ever met, in fact, and when he offered to bring us here we were glad to come. Lone Dog says you told him to find a man suitable for a husband for you and bring him here, and he has done so."

"But you are too young for me," declared the princess, shaking her head. "You are a paleface, too; I cannot marry a paleface."

"Oh! I am not the one he brought. Don't get that into your head. I am not looking for the job of a prince. I have a sweetheart of my own race, and some time we will marry."

A haughty look came over the girl's face at this.

It was evident that she was ashamed of having said so much.

But just then Lone Dog helped her out by saying:

"Me fetch a Chinee for you, and if you no want a Chinee you can take me."

"Untie the chief's hands!" commanded Metahwa, quickly, in her own language, while her face never changed expression.

This was done, and then she bade the Choctaw step forward.

She held out her hand, and he quickly took it and kissed it.

Wild saw that there was a happy light in her eyes now, which was ample proof that he had been quite right when he said Lone Dog had been too slow when he was with the Lost Tribe before.

There was no doubt but that Princess Metahwa wanted the Choctaw for her husband.

The girl must have been past twenty, while the chief was hardly more than thirty.

Wild was now pretty well satisfied that he was to be given the liberty of the valley, so he walked around and busied himself looking at things.

Here and there were big urns of gold and silver, and when he looked at them he made up his mind that there was a fortune right there.

No doubt these treasures had belonged to the Aztecs, and that the place had been found by a band of Apaches, who were tired of living in warfare, and who had settled down to live as nearly as they could like their forefathers.

The whole scene was one of semi-barbaric splendor. The gay trappings of the attendants and the jewels worn by the princess would have cost a large sum of money had they been bought where civilization exists.

Wild noticed that the Indians were paying strict attention to him as he examined the various things that struck him as being unique and valuable.

But he did not act as though he was delighted at the sight of so much gold lying around; he merely looked at it and then passed on.

Pretty soon he came back to where the princess and Lone Dog were standing.

The two were talking in very low tones, but the young deadshot was satisfied that they were making great headway in their courtship.

"Princess Metahwa," the boy said, speaking in his cool and easy way, "I reckon you had better advise your followers to build some kind of a blockade at the mouth of the underground passage. I wouldn't be surprised if the Apaches get in here at any minute. My friends are waiting for me near the place, so if you will give me a pass that will permit me to go where I please in the valley, I'll go over there now. If I can help you out any I will be glad to do it."

"It is well, Young Wild West, most noble paleface boy," answered the girl. "Lone Dog has told me much about you and your friends. He says you are the greatest fighting brave he ever met, and that you always know just what to do. You have the freedom of the Hidden Valley, and so have your friends. I will depend on you to help fight off the Apaches if they come. Here! Take this! That will make it known to my people that you are not to be interfered with in any way. It will, in fact, make them obey you."

She handed him a necklace of gold nuggets that were interspersed with emeralds in the rough.

It was a rather gaudy affair, and quite heavy, for there must have been at least two hundred dollars worth of virgin gold in the quantity of nuggets, but Wild accepted it with a bow of thanks and placed it about his neck.

The moment the Indians standing about saw this they faced the boy and bowed to him, signifying that they had the utmost respect for him.

Having done this much to ease our hero's feelings, the princess spoke to her followers for a few minutes in their own language, telling them that their dreaded foes, the Apaches, were likely to come there, and urging them to go and build a blockade at the mouth of the passage.

The result was that the princess and the Choctaw chief were quickly left alone, and they went and sat down before one of the gaudy-looking tepees.

Wild was about to turn and go through the short underground passage when Hop called to him from the window of the palace.

The boy was not much surprised when this happened, for he knew quite well that the clever Chinaman must be in the building yet.

"What's the trouble, Hop?" he asked.

"Me wantee comee outee, so be, Misler Wild," was the reply.

"All right, Hop. I'll meet you at the door when I get around to the other side. I reckon it will be all right."

"You allee light, anyhow, Misler Wild. Me velly muchee glad, so be. But me no gittee um chancee to makee love to um pletty plincess. Lat no fair! Maybe she likee me bettee lan un Injun chief."

"Oh, no! She wanted Lone Dog, and now she has got him. She was not looking for a heathen Chinee for a husband, even though she is a heathen herself. But she worships fire, and not a wooden god, like you do."

Wild waited to say no more, but walked through the passage and came around to the other side.

He found Hop standing at the arched doorway, bowing and smiling to about fifty women and children, who were looking at him in awe.

The Chinaman wore the gaudy raiment of one of the royal attendants, but they could easily tell that he was not an Indian.

"What are you doing with that rig on, Hop?" asked Wild, who could not help smiling.

"Me allee samee findee plenty clothes in lere, so me thlink me might as well puttee on, so be."

"Well, I reckon it don't make much difference. Come! As soon as I find my weapons I am going back to the camp."

Wild looked around and soon found what he wanted. His belt lay on a slab of stone, just as it had been taken from him.

He was not long in buckling it about him, and then he started for the camp, Hop following him.

They had not got halfway there when they overtook about forty of the men of the valley, who were carrying slabs of rock to build the barricade.

Wild knew that it would take them a full week to complete the job, since they did not appear to have any horses to drag the stones where they wanted them.

"Velly muchee slow people, so be, Misler Wild," remarked the clever Chinaman, as he gave a hitch at something he was carrying under his gayly-decorated robe. "Ley no knowee velly muchee."

"That's right, Hop. But say! What have you got under that blanket?"

"Me allee samee gottee um gold clown, so be."

"Is that so? Well, you've got a nerve to steal the crown of the princess, I must say."

"Lat allee light. Maybe she no care. She gottee um man she wantee, and she no care for um clown jestee now."

"That's so. Well, take it along. It will interest Charlie, Jim and the girls, no doubt."

The natives did not offer to interfere with them, so they soon reached the camp.

To say that their friends were much relieved when they saw them coming hardly expresses it.

They had heard the loud report, and missing Hop, they knew that he must have caused it; and they thought that Wild and the Choctaw chief might have got into trouble from it.

CHAPTER X.

THE APACHES MEET WITH A CRUSHING DEFEAT.

Those waiting at the camp did not know what to make of it when they saw Hop togged out in the ancient costume of the Aztecs.

He walked right up to them, and removing his gorgeous headgear, took the golden crown from under his robe and placed it upon his head.

"Me allee samee um Empelor of China now, so be," he said, with a bland smile. "Me velly smartee Chinee."

"Let me see that crown, Hop," spoke up Arietta, as she ran to him and took it from his head.

As it was of solid gold she found it much heavier than she had expected to.

"My!" she exclaimed. "Why, that must be worth over a hundred dollars, if it really is gold."

"I reckon it is gold all right," Wild answered, as he took it and weighed it in his hands. "But this is nothing. Gold is plentiful here in this valley. There are all sorts of queer-looking urns made of gold back there in the village. I took a walk around and saw them. I examined some of them, too, so there is no mistake about it. This valley was no doubt once inhabited by some of the Aztec tribes. While these Indians are not Aztecs, but simply people who found the place, they know sufficient of the history of the ancient tribes to make them try to emulate them. They are a peaceable lot, I reckon, so we need not fear of being harmed. Just look at this necklace. The princess gave that to me, and she told me that it would protect us from all harm while we are in the Hidden Valley."

The next minute all hands were busy examining the necklace and the gold crown.

They were much pleased, as well as surprised, and not one of them was sorry that they had saved the life of the Choctaw chief, and then followed him to the Hidden Valley of the Lost Tribe.

Wild told them all that had happened, and then Hop related the part he had taken in it.

"So ther Injun is goin' ter marry ther princess, is he?" remarked the scout, a smile showing on his face. "Well, I s'pose there will be a mighty big time when that happens. It'll be what you call a royal weddin', I reckon."

"No doubt," our hero answered. "Well, since there is enough here to interest us for some little time, I reckon we can stay here a while. The only thing about it is that the Apaches might find a way to get there, and if that happens there will be a whole lot of trouble."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a series of yells sounded from the mouth of the passage that was not far distant, and then a band of Indians came into view.

"They have got here, by jingo!" exclaimed the young deadshot. "The natives here were just about to start building a blockade across the mouth of the passage, but the measly redskins must have found a way to get over the chasm, and then it was easy enough for them to come on down here. I reckon we have got to fight now, so everybody get ready for business."

The Indians who had been carrying the slab of stone in the direction of the mouth of the passage, turned and fled in terror.

They no doubt saw that their foes were armed with guns, and that made them feel that they had no show, whatever.

Wild knew that the best thing they could do was to get to the village of the Lost Tribe, so he quickly gave the two Chinamen orders to take down the tents and lead the two pack-horses.

The Apaches had halted when they marched into the valley, and the yells that went up from them were no doubt exultant ones, as they realized they had found the place they had been so anxious to get to.

It happened that some trees hid the camp from their view, so our friends had a good chance to leave the spot without being observed, unless the red fiends should take a notion to come that way.

The chief of the band, who was called Bad Face, according to what the Choctaw chief had told our hero, did not offer to pursue the fleeing natives of the valley, but at once organized a war dance.

No doubt he felt that he would have little trouble in overcoming them, so he wanted to get his braves worked up into a war-like state before making the attack.

The Apaches all had their war paint on, and they looked savage enough as they joined in the dance and circled about their leader.

While this was going on our friends were hurrying to break up the camp and get the pack-horses loaded.

It did not take many minutes to do this, so they succeeded in making a start from the place without being seen by their foes.

Wild knew that they would have a good chance to get to the village without being observed by them, provided they did not take a notion to come that way.

They all had horses, and this would enable them to make a rush through the village and overcome the inhabitants in short order, unless there were those there who could shoot them down and force them to retreat.

Off to the left they rode, taking care to keep the trees between them and the Apaches, and when they had covered a mile they turned sharply to the right and headed straight for the village.

As they rode into it a few minutes later they found the inhabitants in a state of terror.

The braves were grouped at the edge of the collection of huts and were armed with bows and arrows, stone hatchets and spears.

"I reckon them galoots wish they had guns," observed the scout, as he looked at the barbaric crowd. "Why, they won't stand no more show ag'in them thirty or forty Apaches, with them things to fight with, than nothin'."

"Not unless it comes to a hand-to-hand fight, Charlie,"

replied our hero. "They're a pretty hard-looking lot, I reckon, and most likely they could put up a good fight."

"Yes, but ther Apaches ain't goin' ter let it come to no hand-to-hand fight. They're too smart for that. They'll ride around on their horses and pick off ther galoots jest as they please. It won't take 'em a very long time to clean out all of 'em here."

"Yes, but we are not going to let them clean them out," declared our hero, his eyes flashing with determination. "I reckon the Apaches are the ones who will be cleaned out before this thing is over."

With Arietta at his side, Wild rode at the head of the column straight into the village.

He halted before the stone building that was called the palace and then dismounted.

The next minute Lone Dog appeared on the scene.

"The Apaches have come, Young Wild West?" he said questioningly.

"Yes, Lone Dog," was the reply. "They must have found a way to get across the chasm and they have got there. That's too bad, but we will have to do our best to whip them, that's all."

"You will fight for the Lost Tribe then?"

"Certainly we will. You don't suppose we would go against the princess and her people, do you?"

"Lone Dog is glad to hear Young Wild West say that!" exclaimed the Choctaw, his face beaming with delight. If you drive away the Apaches, so they will not come back again, the princess will give you all the gold, silver and jewels you can take away. She has told me that, and her word is good. She rules her people well, and what she says they are willing to do."

"Well, that's all right, Lone Dog. I reckon we might take away a little of the gold, because gold is something nice to have. It can always be turned into money, you know. If there are any jewels here that the princess thinks she can get along without, we'll take some of them, too. The girls are fond of jewels, of course."

Wild knew that the best place for the girls just then was at the other side of the stone building, so he called them to go on through the underground passage with him.

"The rest of you come, too," he called out, beckoning to Hop and Wing to fetch along the pack-horses. "I reckon we don't want to let our supplies fall into the hands of the Apaches, in case they should happen to get here."

The whole party rode on through and made the turn into what might have been called a courtyard.

This was the place where Wild and the Choctaw chief had been taken when their hands were tied behind them.

The princess sat in front of her tepee, and the expression of her face was one of fear and discouragement.

She brightened when she saw the dashing young deadshot, however, and running to him, said:

"Young Wild West, the paleface brave, will help fight our enemy, the Apaches, will he not?"

"You can bet I will, Princess Metahwa," was the reply. "I reckon the Apaches are not going to clean out the valley, so long as we have got anything to shoot with. You just get all your people in here, except those who are willing to fight, and we will show you how we will take care of the red galoots, who are so anxious to kill you all and take the treasures that are here. They will be along pretty soon, and when they come they will meet with a pretty warm reception."

"I will do as Young Wild West says," the girl answered, and then taking the silver whistle that hung from a glittering cord about her neck, she placed it to her lips and blew three shrill blasts.

The result was that the women and children began running that way immediately.

It was quite evident that they knew what the three whistles meant.

The courtyard, if such it could be called, was not a very large one, and the result was that it was pretty well packed with the women and children of the tribe.

But so long as there was room enough for them all it made no difference, as Wild did not intend that they should remain huddled there very long.

He figured that it would not take many hours to defeat the attacking party.

Seeing that everything was all right there, he turned to his partners and said:

"Now then, I reckon we may as well go out and start the ball rolling. We know that old Bad Face and his gang of braves are here for the purpose of cleaning out the valley, as well as looking after our scalps. There is no use in letting them get a start. We will start the fight."

"Lone Dog will go with you," spoke up the Choctaw chief, who had found the weapons that had been taken from him when they were seized by the attendants of the princess.

"Yes, you go with us, for you know how to shoot, and that's what we want just now," our hero answered.

Leading the way on foot, for Wild thought it not necessary to take their horses just then, the brave young deadshot hastened through the valley to the road that led to it from the woods below.

As they came to a turn they saw the Apaches advancing, their horses on a walk.

Wild quickly counted them and found that there were just thirty-nine of them, all told.

Nearly all of them had rifles, too, which made them quite a formidable foe, indeed.

But his courage never once failed him. There were plenty of places from behind which they could fire upon the Apaches, and by making every shot tell he felt that they would not be long in getting the best of the redskins.

The four now took positions behind the rocks and waited for the Apaches to draw nearer.

They came on in silence, evidently believing that it was better to proceed in that way than to rush up yelling and shooting.

Not until they were within a hundred feet of the four behind the rocks did Wild give the order to open fire on them.

When he did this four rifles began cracking away rapidly and the Apaches were unhorsed so fast that before they could turn and scatter fully a dozen of them lay upon the ground, either dead or dying.

"Mow them down, boys!" cried Wild, who was now

bent upon exterminating the whole band, if it was possible.

Crang! Crang! Crang! Cr-ang!

The rifles kept cracking as the Apaches turned and fled, and at every shot one of them fell.

Both Wild and his partners had been trying hard to get a shot at the leader of the band, but it seemed that Bad Face was too foxy to be got, and he had been almost at the rear when the attack was made.

When the redskins could no longer be seen at least half of their number had been shot.

As the firing ceased about fifty of the inhabitants of the valley appeared on the scene, showing that they were ready to take part in the fight, should it be necessary.

Wild allowed them to come up close enough to see the result of the brief battle, and then he waved them back.

The Apaches had fired probably a hundred shots during the brief encounter, but not one of them had taken effect.

"I reckon that's pretty good," the dashing young deadshot remarked, giving a nod of satisfaction. "I hate to join in such a slaughter, but I regarded it as extremely necessary, not only for the safety of the inhabitants of the Hidden Valley, but for ourselves. The chances are that those who have retreated won't go very far away. They will hold a pow-wow, and then decide to make another attack. They won't make an open attack, however, for they have lost too many of their men for that. They will be very sly about it next time. But I reckon we will take care of them all right. I am not worried a bit."

"Young Wild West is the bravest of all the palefaces I ever saw," said Lone Dog. "The Princess Metahwa will never forget him for what he had done for her people."

"That's all right, Lone Dog," answered our hero, smiling at him. "I reckon the Apaches wanted us about as bad as they did the people here. It was simply a case of fight and kill as many as possible. If Bad Face wants to go on and try it again he's welcome to do it. I am waiting for a chance to get a shot at him, and when I do you can bet the Apaches will be without a leader in double-quick time. I never miss when I fire, Lone Dog."

"Me go back and tell the princess what has happened," Lone Dog said.

"All right; I reckon I'll go with you. Charlie and Jim will stay here and watch for the approach of the redskins, should they take a notion to come again. They will fire if they do, of course, and then you and I won't be long in getting here to help them. We will go and see what the princess thinks about it."

The two at once set out, leaving Charlie and Jim to watch for the appearance of the Apaches.

CHAPTER XI.

WIPING OUT THE LAST OF THE APACHES.

Bad Face, the chief of the Apache band, was a very shrewd redskin.

Though he had suffered a crushing defeat he was not discouraged.

He knew very well who had killed his braves, and that made him all the more anxious to win out.

Ever since he had heard of the Hidden Valley the chief had been more than anxious to get there, so he might kill off the Indians who had secluded themselves there and carry off a lot of plunder.

By being persistent he had discovered the trail that led through the passage from what might be termed the outside world, and then he was not long in finding a way to cross the chasm.

A bridge had been built by his braves, and then put over the chasm, so that all might cross with safety.

But it had taken considerable time to do this, and hence it was that they had not entered the valley until rather late that morning.

The Apaches had not expected to be attacked that way, and they had lost half their men as a result.

But the chief rallied them when they got out of range of the Winchesters that created such a havoc in their ranks, and he lost no time in impressing it upon the survivors how necessary it was for them to kill all who opposed them and take possession of the valley.

"The scalps of the palefaces must be ours, and the treasure that is here will be divided among those who live when it is all over," he declared. "My braves shall have the pick of the nice squaws who are here and all will be happy. We must not lose the fight now, my braves. We have gone too far for that."

Thus encouraged, the Apaches declared that they would stick to the end.

They only waited about ten minutes after the first defeat, and then they divided into two parties, leaving their horses behind them.

Knowing just where their foes were located, they crept up from both sides, so they might surprise and capture them.

The red fiends did not want to kill them outright now; they wanted to take them alive, so they might torture them.

Charlie and Jim were watching carefully, but they did not see the painted braves creeping up on either side.

Suddenly the scout saw an Indian dart from behind a rock straight for them.

Crack!

His revolver spoke promptly and the brave went down.

But just then two more appeared from the other side, and taken unawares, Jim was knocked down and held to the ground.

Then more of them appeared.

Charlie fired two more shots and then he was thrown to the ground and quickly disarmed.

In a very short time they were securely bound and being dragged away by their captors.

Bad Face was delighted beyond measure when he found his braves had succeeded in capturing two of the palefaces.

He ordered a retreat to the mouth of the passage, and Charlie and Jim were thrown upon horses, as though they were nothing more than sacks of cornmeal and quickly taken there.

Bad Face was clever enough to know that the passage would be an admirable place to hold out in, if his foes pressed him too hard, so he ordered the rocks and stones piled up before it, so they might take refuge behind them.

While this work was going on he had two of his braves posted where they could note the approach of the friends of the two captives.

In a few minutes he had an admirable headquarters quite safe against an attack.

Then it was that he turned his attention to Charlie and Jim.

"The paleface dogs have got to die!" he exclaimed, as he kicked them and spat at them to show how he felt toward them.

"We know that, Chief," answered Jim Dart, coolly. "Everyone has to die, you know."

"The paleface dogs die soon," said Bad Face, his eyes blazing savagely. "They will not live to see the sun over their heads. They must die by torture."

"All right, you sneakin' galoot! Go ahead with your game!" exclaimed the scout. "I reckon a man can't die but once, anyhow. You catched us nappin', an' you've got it all your own way jest now. But Young Wild West will come mighty quick, an' then you'll sing a different tune, I reckon."

"The paleface man heap much fool!" retorted the chief, angrily. "Young Wild West no come. He no here."

"Young Wild West will come pretty quick, Chief," spoke up Dart, acting as though he had not the least doubt of it. "He will find a way to wipe out the rest of your band. You ought to know that. The best thing you can do is to let us go free, and then leave this place. You can never get at the Indians who live here. That is impossible, for Young Wild West won't allow it."

"Shut up, paleface boy!"

The chief made a kick at Jim's face, and it was only by turning his head quickly that he avoided it.

Then he tried the same thing with Charlie.

But the scout was ready for him, and with a quick movement, he gripped the moccasin with his teeth and gave a smart jerk backward.

As little as this would seem to amount to, the chief lost his balance and went flat on the ground.

It was at that very moment that a rifle shot sounded, and one of the braves, who had been posted on a ledge above to watch for the approach of the enemy, came rolling down.

He struck the ground right near the chief, and never moved again.

"That was Young Wild West," said Jim, coolly, as Bad Face got upon his feet. "Now you know what will happen to you if you don't let us go mighty quick."

Crang!

Another report sounded from the trees not far distant and then down rolled the other Apache from the ledge.

Crang!

A report rang out from a slightly different direction, and then Bad Face lost a couple of the feathers from his head-dress.

Crang! Crang! Crang!

The three reports rang out in quick succession, showing that one person had fired them, and three of the redskins fell.

The rest of them fired, but they had nothing to aim at, so their bullets were simply wasted.

Charlie made a struggle to free himself, for he saw that the fiends were paying little or no attention to him now.

He found that the thongs gave a little, and then with a desperate effort he got his left hand free.

This gave him the chance to free the other, and he was not long in doing it.

Then he reached over to the body of one of the Indians that had tumbled down from the ledge and secured the knife that was in his belt.

Two quick slashes and he was free of his bonds.

Without getting up, he reached over and cut Jim loose.

Another shot sounded, and the result was that one more brave bit the dust.

Young Wild West and the Choctaw chief were certainly getting in their fine work now.

Charlie and Jim knew it must be Wild and Lone Dog, for there were no others to come and do such shooting, unless it might be the girls.

Bad Face was now thoroughly frightened.

He crawled half under a rock and remained there.

Suddenly Charlie and Jim sprang up and darted around to the front of the breastwork of rocks.

Meanwhile let us see just what our hero and Lone Dog were up to.

They had hurried as fast as they could when they heard the shots and calls for help.

That Charlie and Jim had been caught by the Apaches our hero knew, right away.

He had called the Choctaw chief and they had hurried after the red fiends.

Hop followed them.

Wild managed to get near enough to the spot where the Apaches made their stand to hear their voices as they talked.

He could also hear the voices of Charlie and Jim.

Finally he got a chance at the two redskins on the ledge, and he was not long in bringing them down, as the reader knows.

Lone Dog managed to get where he could look right into the midst of the Apaches, and then it was that he fired a shot at the villainous chief and missed.

Wild was not long in getting where he was and then he got a chance at them.

Hop took it all in, and when he saw Charlie and Jim come from behind the rocks he decided to help them get away.

He crept around to the left and soon got quite close to the Apaches.

Lighting the fuse of a big home-made bomb, he hurled it with all his might into the midst of the terrified savages.

A report as loud as a small field-piece rang out and a dense smoke at once arose.

"Lun, Misler Charlie! Lun, Misler Jim!" the Chinaman shouted.

The scout and Dart did not need to be told twice.

They ran toward Hop.

They reached him without a shot being fired from the Apaches, and then it was but a couple of minutes before they joined Wild and Lone Dog.

"I reckon we have got to clean out all of them, boys," said our hero.

Under cover of the trees, he led the way around to the left of the mouth of the passage.

Then he was able to see the redskins who remained alive.

There were not many of them, but when our hero and the Choctaw chief got done firing they were all dead or dying.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

When Young Wild West and his partners came back to the village they did so with the full knowledge that none of the Apaches had escaped.

Charlie and Jim found the weapons that had been taken from them, and Lone Dog had gathered as many rifles as he could carry.

Arietta met them before they got to the huts.

Princess Metahwa ran to greet her lover, and after he had clasped her in his arms and imprinted a kiss on her forehead, he told of the complete annihilation of the Apaches.

The news was soon spread throughout the village, and then the princess issued an order that stones should be carried to the entrance and that the opening be walled up, so that no other should ever enter the Hidden Valley by that way again.

When Wild heard this he went to her and said:

"I reckon we don't intend to stay here over a day or two, Princess Metahwa, so I wish you would order your men to get the material for walling in the passage on the ground. The day after to-morrow we will leave at noon, if you have no objections."

"I have no objections, of course," was the reply. "But I assure you that I would like you to remain here. I think I will have the marriage of myself and Lone Dog take place the morning before you go."

Wild told his partners and the girls of this. There was lots to see, and before night many valuable presents from the princess were brought to them.

They passed the night in the village, having one of the larger of the huts for their own private use.

The next day they saw about all there was to be seen, and by night they considered that they had quite enough of it.

After breakfast the following morning two of the girls of the village came to Arietta, Anna and Eloise carrying a sheet of silver upon which were a number of precious stones.

When told that they were for them to divide among themselves the girls were astonished, as well as delighted.

It is needless to say that they did not quarrel over the division.

A little later Hop Wah was requested to return the golden crown and the costume he had taken from the stone palace, and when Wild told him to do so, he lost no time in obeying.

The wedding feast was being cooked by the women of the village, and our friends learned that everyone there, men, women and children, were to partake of it.

It was a great thing that the princess should find a husband from the outside world, and they wanted to celebrate it fully.

After a while a bell clanged, and then our friends knew that the wedding was about to take place.

Six attendants soon came and escorted them to the stone building that was called the palace.

There stood the couple to be married, and when our friends took their places the priest stepped forward.

Everything being in readiness, the couple joined hands and marched before the altar that had been set up in the center of the stone building.

Lone Dog, attired in the most expensive and gaudy suit of raiment that could be found in the whole village, stood there as straight as an arrow.

The musicians, three in number, began beating on their rude drums and then about forty of the children started to sing a weird song.

The priest, who was to perform the ceremony, looked something like a medicine man attired in his regalia.

He proceeded in a tone that was soft and rather musical to recite the marriage ceremony.

This lasted perhaps five minutes, and then the two were told to kneel on the slab of stone they had been standing upon and clasp hands.

Then a pile of fagots that had been placed upon the stone floor within a few feet of them was lighted.

As the flames went upward, half a dozen maidens appeared and began sprinkling something upon the floor.

The result was that a perfume that was almost strong enough to stifle one pervaded the place.

As the blaze died down the priest commanded the couple to arise and pronounced them man and wife.

There is little need to deal any further with this story.

When noon came, our friends mounted their horses and rode away to the mouth of the passage.

They had with them easily twenty thousand dollars worth of gold, not speaking of the jewels that had been given to the girls.

The crowd of Indians followed them and gave them a rousing cheer as they rode on through the passage.

Then it was that our friends heard them at work walling up the mouth of the passage.

It is needless to say that Young Wild West and his friends were not long in reaching a town, and there we will leave them, only to take up their further adventures in the next number of "Wild West Weekly."

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST FOLLOWED BY FIENDS; or, ARIETTA AND THE PLOTTERS," which will be the next number (366) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

A curious remedy for sleeplessness is used by the inhabitants of the Samoan Islands. They confine a snake in a hollow bamboo, and the hissing sound emitted by the reptile is said to quickly induce slumber.

A leading Parisian milliner has just invented a hat which may be adapted to various occasions at will. It can be taken to pieces. When its removable brim is packed away under the brow it becomes a close-fitting toque suitable for motoring, railway traveling or for walks in rough weather. If its owner finds herself unexpectedly called upon to appear in evening dress she has simply to readjust her crown, and she is ready for any function demanding the greatest elegance.

Mining men who have just arrived from Fairbanks, Alaska, bring glowing news of gold prospects in the Innoko district and along the creeks of the Itadarod country, 140 miles from Innoko. William Koon, of Fairbanks, said: "When I left Fairbanks a great many stampeders with big outfits were starting for the district. Gold dust taken from several good claims there already opened had begun to show up in Fairbanks, and its appearance was accepted as confirmation of the good reports given in letters and by returning stampeders. The Innoko district has surpassed all expectations."

Frank W. Matzke, two miles east of Richland, Wis., has a number of hives of bees, and when a big white goose pecked on the outside of the hive the support gave way. The bees came swarming out, and the white goose was covered with them. The goose squawked as it never squawked before. Its shrieks attracted the other geese, and soon the whole flock became mixed up with the bees. Mr. Matzke and his young son, with their heads wrapped in mosquito netting, hastened to the rescue of the screaming fowls. Three of the geese did not survive long, but the others, although badly stung, do not appear to be suffering.

A dozen whales chased the two-masted schooner John S. Presson, Capt. Chantree, many miles while the vessel was proceeding toward Boston from Mount Desert with a cargo of gravel. Capt. Chantree is unwilling to state that the whales had evil designs on the schooner, but he admits the leviathans kept uncomfortably close to the coaster, blowing, sounding and gamboling as if they considered an opportunity to race the Presson too good to be overlooked. Capt. Chantree does not know when the whales closed in on his schooner, for they were sighted early in the morning when the vessel was not far from Seguin, and did not disappear till the Presson was abreast Thatcher's, off Cape Ann.

There is a valuable strip of land on Michigan avenue, Chicago, that nobody seems to own. At least no one has been able to prove his ownership as yet. It is the thirty-four-foot strip left between the roadway of the street and the new sidewalk that the commissioners have been laying in Grant Park north of Jackson Boulevard. At the rate real estate values have piled up on downtown property within the last few years it is figured that there is an alderman's ransom—kingly ransoms being out of date—tied up in this patch of ground. Three-eighths of a mile long, it contains 67,320 square feet, valued at more than $4,000,000, if neighboring values are to be accepted. But, characteristic of conditions on the lake front, much uncertainty surrounds its ownership. Instead of fighting over it, however, calling in Fernando Jones and rushing to the Supreme Court, the City and Park Board had decided to plant grass seed and call it "quits."

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

"He loves her simply for her money," said Miss Passay. "I wouldn't give much for a man who didn't love me for myself alone." "But then remember," said Miss Pepprey, "even to such a man you couldn't give much."

Disgruntled Passenger—I thought this was the limited express. Conductor (Oklahoma R. R.)—That's what it's called, sir. Passenger—Huh! What is there limited about it? Conductor (after reflection)—The time for meals.

"Do you know who that old gentleman is talking to our hostess?" asked Mrs. Blunderer of the lady sitting beside her. "That," answered the lady coldly, "is my son." "Oh," gasped Mrs. Blunderer in confusion, "he's a good deal older than you are, is he not?"

A colored man complained to the storekeeper that a ham which he had purchased there was not good. "The ham is all right, Zeph," insisted the storekeeper. "No, it ain't, boss," insisted the negro. "Dat ham's shore bad!" "How can that be," continued the storekeeper, "when it was cured only last week?" The colored man scratched his head reflectively and finally suggested, "Well, sah, then it must have had a relapse."

Among the prisoners brought before a Chicago police magistrate one Monday morning was one, a beggar, whose face was by no means an unfamiliar one to the judge. "I am informed that you have again been found begging in the public streets," said his honor sternly, "and yet you carried in your pocket over $10 in currency." "Yes, your honor," proudly returned the mendicant. "I may not be as industrious as some, but, sir, I am no spendthrift."

"When visiting a certain town in the Midlands," says a medical man, "I was told of an extraordinary incident wherein the main figure, an economical housewife, exhibited, under trying circumstances, a trait quite characteristic of her. It seems that she had by mistake taken a quantity of poison—mercurial poison—the antidote for which, as all should know, comprises the whites of eggs. When this antidote was being administered, the order for which the unfortunate lady had overheard, she managed to murmur, although almost unconscious: 'Mary, Mary! Save the yolks for the puddings!'"

THE COUNTERFEITER'S DUPE

By KIT CLYDE.

A few years ago a certain small but fine building on Third Avenue was opened as a clothing store that because of the excellent quality of the goods and the cheap prices of the same, soon became popular.

The proprietor was known as Darch Wyatt; and it was said that the stock that brought him in such handsome profits was always purchased at auction or of country manufacturers.

He had in his employ a young man named Henry Burnham—a fine, talented fellow of twenty-one, who would have made fame and fortune as an engraver of steel could he have secured a paying position for the exercise and advancement of his peculiar genius.

But being a stranger in the city, and without money or friends, he had failed to procure employment as an engraver, and at length, disappointed, homeless, and often hungry, he had gratefully accepted the situation offered him by Darch Wyatt, with whom he lodged and boarded in the comfortably-appointed apartments over the store.

It was here that I was called upon to attend him professionally.

I was summoned by Miss Wyatt—an elderly, middle-aged woman, who was very deaf and nearly blind, and who was the sister and housekeeper of Henry's employer.

I found the young man very ill, and a diagnosis assured me that he was suffering from the effects of arsenical poison.

I at once administered the usual antidotes, and then watched with him until he was past danger, after which I questioned him cautiously to ascertain, if possible, in what manner the fatal drug had been taken into his system.

But I obtained no vital information from his prompt, straightforward answers.

He had eaten breakfast as usual with the family, and then gone down to his duties in the store, where he had drank a glass of sample sherry with Mr. Wyatt, with whom he was and always had been upon the most affectionately friendly terms.

Just before luncheon-time he had been taken ill, and Mr. Wyatt had also complained of feeling badly.

This sherry was a fresh purchase, and was kept in a closet behind the desk in the office.

As I went downstairs I had decided to ask Mr. Wyatt to allow me to examine the wine, and finding him engaged I sat down to wait until he should be at liberty for an unhurried and unconstrained interview.

The person with whom he was conversing proved to be a country manufacturer who had delivered goods, and received payment from Henry Burnham a few days before.

Both men were greatly disturbed, and spoke in angry, irritated tones, and seemed entirely unconscious that I was within a hearing proximity.

"But are you positive that these are the bills my agent paid you?" asked Mr. Wyatt, excitedly, closely examining several twenty dollar notes.

"I cannot be mistaken," was the firm and angry reply. "I had taken no others of the same denomination in months, and had only small bills in my safe."

"And who told you they were counterfeit?"

"They told me at the bank."

"Ah," returned Wyatt, with a disagreeable laugh. "I see—a country bank, of course. Now, I will wager the best overcoat in my store that they are genuine. Just step with me to the bank across the way, and we will hear what an expert has to say."

As he said this he stood partly turned away from his indignant visitor, and holding the notes in his hand, and I saw him distinctly change them with a lightning movement for another roll of bills.

They walked out of the store together, and soon returned.

The country manufacturer looked puzzled and crestfallen.

But decidedly satisfied withal, and Mr. Wyatt was bantering him with great good humor.

"The blockhead who told you the twenties were counterfeits ought to be compelled to pay you for the trouble he made you," he said at last. "Let us drink to his confusion in a bottle of rare old sherry—the finest in the city."

He unlocked the closet, took out a bottle, looked at it, and set it aside on the desk by which I was still standing unheeded.

Then he took out another, drew the cork, and filled a glass for his visitor and another for himself.

They drank together and then Wyatt accompanied the man to the door with the most agreeable politeness.

As he did so I noticed the bottle on the desk.

It was partly emptied, and I saw about the nozzle a dust of fine white powder.

Instantly and on a sudden impulse, I seized the bottle, and secured it in an inner pocket of my coat, and then I sauntered carelessly down the store to meet the proprietor who was returning.

"Well, sir, what can I sell you to-day?" he inquired blandly, not knowing that I was a physician, and had attended Henry Burnham.

When I informed him of the fact, his countenance changed perceptibly. An expression that seemed one of pain and anxiety chased away the bland smile in an instant.

"He is not seriously ill?" he asked.

"Not at all; he will be all right shortly," I answered.

"That is good," he returned. "I confess I have been unreasonably anxious about Henry recently."

"Why?" I inquired.

"Well, I suppose I may tell you," he replied, with seeming hesitation, "especially as you physicians are almost masonic in your notions of secrecy. The young man has acted strangely lately; I have fancied that he was not exactly right in his mind—in fact, I have feared that he has contemplated suicide. And there are other things that trouble me. In one or two instances he has paid my creditors in spurious money procured goodness knows where and how, for in each instance the money with which I entrusted him was good. But I am fond of Henry, and I do not like to suspect him of wilful dishonesty."

"What are his habits and associations?" I asked.

"Good as far as I can judge; but it is scarcely possible to know what a young man's habits are outside of his business, in a large city."

"True," I assented, distrusting his oily, sanctimonious tones, and feeling somehow, that he was not as friendly toward Henry Burnham as he desired me to believe.

"Will it be necessary for you to see your patient again?" he inquired.

"I hope not," was my answer, as I left the store.

But a week later I was summoned in great haste.

I was told that the young man, to escape a threatened arrest for passing counterfeited bank-notes, had taken poison, and was supposed to be dying.

I found his room guarded by officers, and his employer, with a white, haggard visage, watching beside him.

"This is a pitiful case, doctor," said Wyatt. "I would give half my possessions to see this young man restored to honor and life once more. It is horrible to see him like this—dying by his own hand to avoid the disgrace of his crimes."

"He will not die," I said. "The dose was too large, fortunately, and I can save him."

I shall never forget the look on Wyatt's face as I spoke—it was like the ferocious distortion seen on the front of a hyena cheated of the victim whose blood it has tasted.

And yet he said in grateful, pitying tones:

"Thank goodness for that, for possibly he may be more innocent than he seems."

For hours I stayed with Henry Burnham, never leaving him for an instant.

I was alone with him when he recovered sufficiently to converse coherently of his trouble.

"Did you take poison purposely, Henry?" I asked.

He looked at me in utter wonder.

"I did not know I had taken it at all," he answered.

"It is arsenic that made you sick now and before," I asserted. "Have you a bitter enemy, do you think?"

"I am unaware of any," was his reply.

"My young friend," I said, deeply interested, "make me your confidant and tell me all about this unhappy affair. I promise you my aid as far as I can help you. Tell me all you know about the counterfeit money you paid Mr. Wyatt's creditors."

His eyes met mine unflinchingly with the utmost perplexity in their blue depths.

"I never handled or passed a counterfeit note in my life to my knowledge," he earnestly declared.

"Henry," I went on impressively, "are you unaware of the fact that to-day you were to be arrested for such a crime! that it is believed that you attempted suicide to escape the officers, who even now are in the next room waiting to take you to prison?"

"I am utterly unaware of it all," he responded, while his fine face whitened with agony and terror.

"Then you are, as I have suspected, the victim of a most infamous plot," I said. "The true transgressor has made you his unconscious tool, and then, fearing criminating disclosures if you should be brought to trial, has attempted your life at a time and in a way that would make your death seem like suicide. Think earnestly if you can, Henry, and tell me is there no circumstance that you can remember with uneasiness or wonder or suspicion?"

He was silent for some time.

"No, sir," he then said; "I can think of nothing. I have never paid out a dollar that I have not received from Mr. Wyatt directly. And yet there is one incident I recall that seemed to me strange at the time. You know that I am, or have been, a steel engraver?"

"Yes, and that fact will be used against you, I fear," I returned.

"Well, my employer used to banter me about my 'useless art,' as he called it. About a year ago he wagered me a new suit that I could not make the plate of a twenty-dollar note; but, half in pique and half in pride, I did it, intending to destroy the plate at once, and I won my new suit. The next day the plate was stolen, and I have never seen it since."

As he finished speaking there was a tap at the door. It was one of the officers, who entered at my bidding. The men of the law were getting impatient, and wished to take their prisoner away at once, if he was sufficiently recovered.

Before they hurried him away, I found an opportune moment for a few more words of advice and encouragement.

"Neither eat a morsel nor drink a drop of anything except what I bring you myself," I charged him, "and I pledge my word that before to-morrow at this hour that the villain for whose crimes you are now suffering shall be brought to justice."

In another hour I had secured the services of the keenest detective in the city, and while in consultation with him I remembered the bottle I had so surreptitiously taken from Wyatt's desk.

I brought it forth and a brief examination of the wine showed that it was strongly impregnated with arsenic.

"Now, sir," I said decidedly to the detective, "I believe that you will find in some out-of-the-way room in that building the stolen plate and all the other equipments necessary to a counterfeiter. It is for you to find a way to search the house without arousing Wyatt's suspicions."

The detective smiled and tossed his head like a war-horse scenting victory.

Through my influence, Henry Burnham was granted an early and private examination.

It took place the next day.

Of course, Mr. Wyatt was necessary as a witness, but it required the services of my detective to find him, as he purposely kept out of the way, although he explained when found that he had most benevolent and praiseworthy reasons for doing so.

The preliminary evidence was all given, and it proved so condemnatory to Henry that the unfortunate young man was about to be committed to prison to await a trial, when I stepped before the bench and requested to be sworn.

As I began my testimony Wyatt arose to leave the room, and at the same moment the detective entered, and one glance at his face told me that he had been successful in his search.

"You are my prisoner," he said, laying his heavy hand on Wyatt's shoulder, and showing his badge. "Let the doctor's evidence be taken."

I soon told all I had to tell, and then the detective spoke.

"And I," he said, "charge this man with every crime known on the calendar. The name 'Darch Wyatt' is but one of a dozen aliases, and the man who bears it is an escaped convict from another state. His store on the avenue has been searched, and part of the basement was found fitted up as a counterfeiter's workshop. The plate that he duped Henry Burnham to engrave, he has used to make spurious notes. These notes he again and again caused that unsuspicious young man to use for him. After accumulating thousands of dollars by this criminal traffic, and knowing that detection was near, he caused his dupe to be suspected, and then, fearing that a trial would disclose his guilt and inhuman conspiracy, he attempted to poison the young fellow yonder, who is as innocent as the gentleman on the bench."

The scoundrel who had at first listened to this charge with a brazen front and defiant bearing, slunk back like a craven for an instant as he saw an officer approaching him with handcuffs.

Then he suddenly wrenched out of the grasp of the detective, and, drawing a revolver, stood at bay.

"You won't march me into a cell as easily as you did my milksop of a tool over there," he shouted, with a glance of hatred toward Henry. "Stand back, or there will be blood shed!"

But the blood that was shed flowed from his own black heart.

With a lightning leap he dashed through the rank of officers, dashed open the door, and undoubtedly, so sudden and unexpectedly had been his wild resistance, would have escaped had he not tripped on the worn matting and fell headlong.

His pistol was discharged as he fell, and the ball crashed through his breast.

In three seconds he was dead, and his violent death seemed a fitting end for his life of crime.

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